



# Be a hero. Donate today.

Every 8 minutes, every day, the American Red Cross responds to a disaster, including home fires. We're there to provide help and hope. We can't do it without you. Your donation to Disaster Relief can help provide temporary housing, hot meals, clothing and comfort to families.



redcross.org



11.23.15 ESFN



### **HOW TO RAISE A QB**

### 45 HOW TO RAISE A QB

Are teams smart or, well, just plain mean to start this many young QBs? BY PETER KEATING

### **48 YEAR 1: CLASS BEGINS**

You can't mistake Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota for anything but rookies. BY MATT BOWEN

### **56 YEAR 2: SECOND READS**

For starters, four starters. BY MIKE SANDO

### 58 YEAR 3: PASS ... FAIL

No starters from 2013? Discuss. BY BEN ARLEDGE

### **60 YEAR 4: STEP UP IN THE POCKET**

Just as he is primed for a leap forward, Andrew Luck is thrown for a loss. BY ELIZABETH MERRILL

### **70 YEAR 5: THE STUDY HAUL**

Andy Dalton, Cam Newton and Colin Kaepernick have emerged from the QB crucible as vastly different men. A story in three acts. BY SETH WICKERSHAM

### **82** FROM JAMEIS TO PEYTON

The career arc of all 32 starting NFL quarterbacks—in graphic form. BY LUKE KNOX

### **FORWARD**

**11 TURTLE POWER** How Maryland (!) gained the top spot in our preseason poll. BY JORDAN BRENNER

**16 TOP 25 POWER RANKINGS** Parity in the game means the race to Houston begins now. BY JAY BILAS

**20 WOMEN'S TOP 10** Disparity in the game means

it's UConn—and everyone else. BY MECHELLE VOEPEL

23 AUSTRALIAN RULES BASKETBALL

Ben Simmons, the projected No. 1 pick, lands at ... LSU? BY DANA O'NEIL

**32 "WHY HIM, WHY ME?"** A young linebacker's struggle with life after a deadly hit. BY ELI SASLOW

40 THERE WILL BE NEW BLOOD A guide to hiring a football coach. BY TRAVIS HANEY AND RYAN McGEE

### COLUMNS

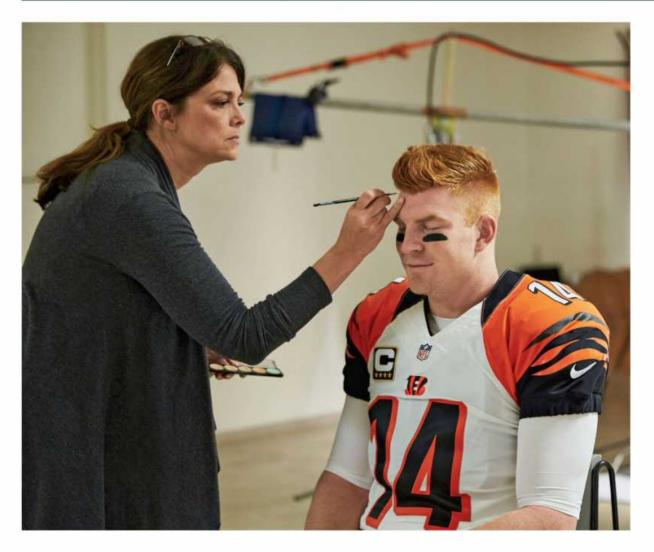
### 8 THE TICKET

Don't be fooled: The Huskies and Longhorns aren't tipping off in China to build a new fan base. BY MINA KIMES

### 84 THE TRUTH

The dearth of minority MLB executives has a new culprit: analytics. BY HOWARD BRYANT

### BEHIND THE PAGES



### Makeup Call

Contributing photographer Miller Mobley on shooting Andy Dalton: "Despite the 7:45 a.m. call time, Andy was such a pleasure to photograph. He showed up on schedule, introduced himself to everyone, put on his eveblack with the help of makeup artist Laurie McSwain—and we got to work. The shoot only lasted about 40 minutes, but in that time, we were able to cover a lot of ground. While doing some research beforehand, I found out that Andy is a big family man. So when I wasn't getting that genuine, authentic smile in a few of the first shots, I asked him about his little boy and he lit up. That's when we got the gold! I also chose James Brown for the set music: I figured only the Godfather of Soul could liven things up that early." MORE ON PAGE 70

McSwain gives Dalton multiple coverages on set at Paul Brown Stadium.

### Senior writer Dana O'Neil on Ben Simmons' instant popularity



"I was pleasantly surprised, but not entirely stunned, at how many people recognized Ben Simmons as he walked among the tailgaters at an LSU football game. The school had launched a marketing

campaign around the freshman, and at 6-foot-10, he's not exactly hard to pick out in a crowd. But then Shaquille O'Neal grabbed him for a photo, saying, 'You're the man now, not me.' It was a quiet moment in the middle of bedlam, meant really for Simmons only, but it practically shouted just the kind of impact Simmons can have on LSU basketball." MORE ON PAGE 23

### Contributing writer Eli Saslow on the return of Cody Seward



"I couldn't believe it when I heard Cody was already playing football again, a week after delivering a clean hit that resulted in the death of another high school player. Cody was suffering,

withdrawing, having nightmares, and yet he was also back on the field and making that same hit again and again. Why put yourself through that? Then I went to Louisiana to watch him play, and that's when I understood. There were 4,000 people at the stadium on a Thursday night—that's like half of the town—and when the team ran out, you could feel the bleachers shake." MORE ON PAGE 32

### Senior writer Elizabeth Merrill on Andrew Luck's reserved nature



"There was a writer in Indianapolis recently to do a story featuring Colts backup QB Matt Hasselbeck. Man, was I jealous. Hasselbeck is the iPhone 6s Plus of quotes; Andrew Luck is the flip phone.

But the two quarterbacks have an amazing chemistry, even though Luck is just 26 and Hasselbeck is 40. They eat dinner together on Saturday nights before games, and Hasselbeck jokingly calls himself the horse whisperer. He admires Luck and wanted to mentor the young QB, but nobody could anticipate that the role this season would be so stressful." MORE ON PAGE 60

Copyright © 2015 ESPN. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without the permission of ESPN The Magazine is prohibited. ESPN The Magazine does not accept and cannot be held responsible for any kind of unsolicited materials. From time to time, we allow selected companies to send mail to our subscribers for products and services that might be of interest. If you would rather not receive such mailings, please send your current mailing label or an exact copy of it to: ESPN, P.O. Box 37325, Boone, IA 50037-0325. PRINTED IN THE USA. MAIL P.O. Box 37325, Boone, IA 50037-0325 CALL 1.888.267.3684 CUSTOMER SERVICE ESNcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com TO CHANGE your address, log on to www.accountinfo.espnmag.com

CONNECT WITH US EMAIL themag@espn.com SOCIAL facebook.com/ESPN, twitter.com/ESPN, instagram.com/ESPN iPAD Visit Apple's Newsstand to download our digital version





### **Behold: Do-It-All Dark Horse Heisman Candidates!**

Pro Football Focus' Gordon McGuinness reveals the best all-around players who just might step up if Leonard Fournette stumbles.

### **Trevone Boykin**

### QUARTERBACK, TCU

Although Boykin didn't perform as well as the numbers indicated last season—he finished as PFF's No. 32-graded passer—this year he has amassed career highs in completion percentage (66.7) and in ypc (6.0). Now PFF's highestgraded QB, the dual-threat signal-caller threw for 28 TDs and ran for six more on his way to 3,451 total yards through eight games. That's 431 yards ... per week.

### **Christian McCaffrey**

### HALFBACK, STANFORD

Stanford's Heisman candidate leads the nation in all-purpose yards [1,954] and has electrified college football fans with 47 forced missed tackles in his 200 offensive touches. McCaffrey, a sophomore, has averaged 6.1 yards per carry—with 2.7 of those coming after contact—and 12.4 yards per catch. Adding to his résumé? His dynamic 29.4 yards per kick return, the fourth-best rate in the Pac-12.

### **Adoree' Jackson**

### RECEIVER/CORNER, USC

Given how good Jackson is at cornerback—nine catches allowed on 151 coverage snaps—USC's decision to use him on offense shouldn't be taken lightly. A true two-way player, Jackson has been an absolute terror at wideout, averaging 17.6 yards on 19 catches, including two for 80-plus yards. But as USC gets healthier at wide receiver, expect to see less of Jackson running routes.

### **Jabrill Peppers**

### SAFETY, MICHIGAN

Peppers has lived up to his five-star rep. Just a sophomore, he is PFF's eighth-best safety, with seven pass breakups and 26 tackles through eight games. He's also a potent returner (12.3 yards per punt return, 27.9 per kick return). And after a rushing TD at Minnesota, he'll likely get more involved on offense too. Hey, we're not saying he's Charles Woodson 2.0, but we're not not saying it either.

### in sider

THE ONLY PLACE FOR EXCLUSIVE ANALYSIS AND CONTENT FROM OUR EXPERTS—AND IT'S FREE FOR MAG SUBSCRIBERS. HERE'S HOW TO BECOME AN ESPN INSIDER!

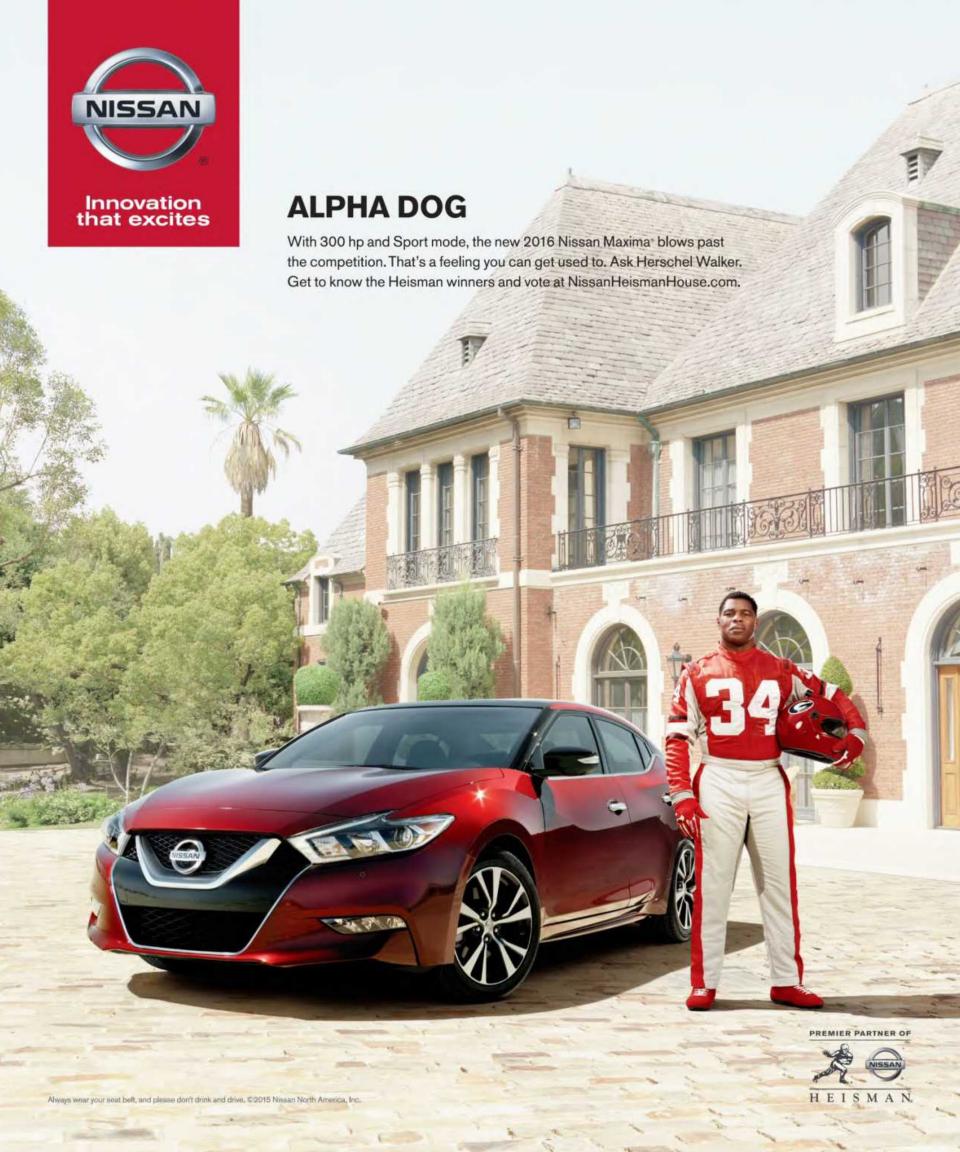
Turn back to the cover and find your account number on the mailing label of your ESPN The Magazine. It starts with ESN and is 10 digits long.

Fire up the Internet and go to ESPN.com/in4free. Enter your account number and click "Activate your Insider account."

Fill in the required fields to create an Insider member name and password. Click "Finish." Congrats! You're already smarter than the average fan.

ALL STATS THROUGH WEEK 9.

6 ESPN 11.23.2015 LARRY PLACIDO/ICON SPORTSWIRE



### THE TICKET



BY Mina Kimes



# Star Recruits When Washington and Texas tip off their men's hoops seasons in China, it really will be about the students—just not the ones you'd think.

n Nov. 14, the Washington and Texas basketball teams will open their seasons in Shanghai, facing off in an arena by the Huangpu River that looks like a deserted spaceship (or as its owners say, "a fresh tumescent pearl"). The matchup will be the first regular-season game played by any American sports league, collegiate or professional, in China. Pac-12 commissioner Larry Scott says he came up with the idea while watching an exhibition in China between UCLA and the Shanghai Sharks, with retired NBA star Yao Ming, who told him that Chinese basketball fans would flock to a regular-season game. He remembers Yao saying, "If they saw two teams competing with something on the line—if they saw the caliber, it would blow them away."

Shortly after becoming the Pac-12's commissioner in 2009, Scott began pressing into China, sending six basketball, soccer and volleyball teams there on summer tours. He's planning another hoops opener there in 2016, and he hopes this will turn into an annual tip-off game. International football is also on the horizon, he says: "We've got schools that are interested in playing in Australia, Canada, Mexico and China."

Like every moneymaking entity in America, the Pac-12 is training its gaze overseas in search of growth. But the conference is hawking more than a game. When universities send their teams abroad, they aren't just looking to sell tickets, T-shirts and advertisements—the teams are the advertisements, a physical manifestation of the product that is an American college education. "It's about turning people into fans of the University of Washington, not Washington basketball," explains Charles Clotfelter, author of Big-Time Sports in American Universities.

This push is being driven by a public budget crunch in the U.S., where many large universities are trimming costs and increasing in-state tuition. International students, most of whom pay full tuition, offer a palliative. At Washington, where nearly 20 percent of the applicants this year hailed from China, foreigners fork over \$51,000 a year, compared with \$27,034 for state residents (many of whom pay less with the help of aid). Unsurprisingly, the number of Chinese students attending U.S. colleges has risen by more than 75 percent since 2010, to about 275,000, according to the Institute of International Education. Four of the 10 American schools with the most international students belong to the Pac-12; at

USC, for example, more than 10 percent of the student body now hails from China (this doesn't include Chinese Americans).

And so it is that, immediately after the Washington-Texas game, the Pac-12 is putting on a college expo for thousands of Chinese high school students. "I can't overstate the interest that families in China have in sending their kids to prestigious Pac-12 universities," Scott says.

In addition to promoting the conference's schools, he also hopes to grow interest in its teams, which could translate into sponsorships and media contracts down the road. (E-commerce giant Alibaba is footing the bill for Washington's trip.) The Pac-12 faces stiff competition; the intercollegiate sports model doesn't exist in China, and schools will vie for attention with the NBA, which signed a \$700 million digital deal in January. But the conference, which has been streaming basketball games—and, as of this fall, football games—through Chinese digital provider LeTV, has a leg up on the pros, according to Scott. "Unlike the NFL and NBA, our schools already have big brands," he says, noting that more than 30 Chinese shops are licensed to sell UCLA-branded clothing.

The Pac-12 isn't the only conference with international ambitions. Penn State, Notre Dame and Navy have all played football in Dublin recently, and Texas is itching to play a game in Mexico City. Longhorns fans flew into a tizzy this spring when former coach Mack Brown was spotted in Dubai; then-athletic director Steve Patterson shot down the football rumor but said other sports, such as golf, could play in the Middle East. In recent years, more than a dozen college basketball teams have held exhibitions in countries ranging from South Korea to Cuba. Like Washington and Texas, these schools are looking to cultivate fans abroad—especially ones who might be willing to fill out an application.



# GOOD BOURBON PROVE.

# Evan Williams

Kentucky STRAIGHT Bourbon





R

LTE

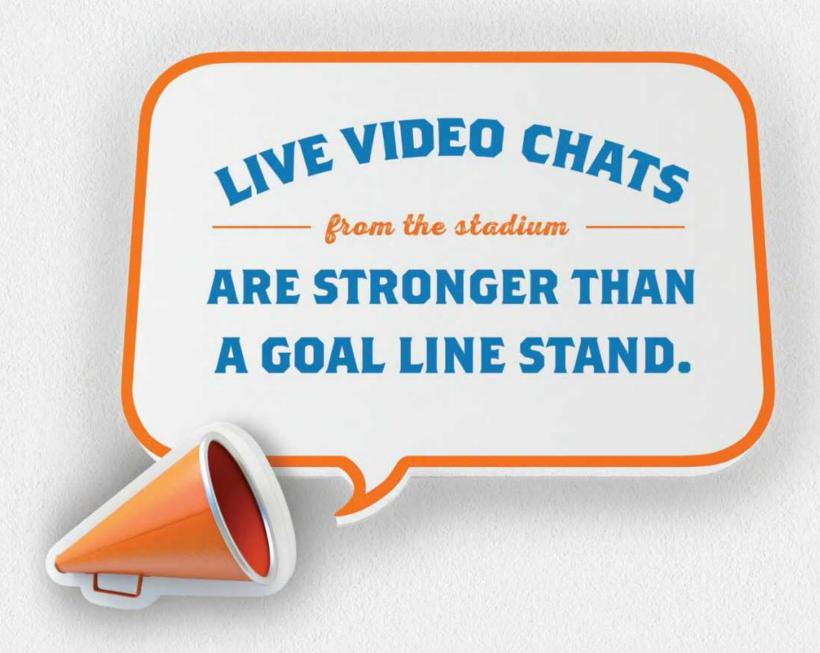
RE

SERIOUSLY GOOD BOURBON.

EvanWilliams.com







## Get stronger.

**AT&T** has the network with the nation's **strongest** 4G LTE signal.



1.866.MOBILITY | ATT.COM/network | Visit a Store



COLLEGE HOOPS TIP-OFF

# **Turtle Power**

Maryland, ESPN's No. 1 team, has the talent to hold pole position through March—but with three new likely starters, questions remain. Here's what the Terps must do to win their first title since 2002.

BY JORDAN BRENNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN LOOMIS 11.23.2015 ESPN 11

### : FORWARD

### **RETURN SULAIMON TO HIS OLD FORM**

The Terps' season might live or die on the play of their two transfers—one of whom comes fully loaded with baggage. In three years at Duke, McDonald's All American Rasheed Sulaimon went from a freshman starter on an Elite Eight squad to a bench player logging fewer than 20 minutes per game and with a rep as a difficult

teammate. By January of last season, Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski ran out of patience and booted Sulaimon off the squad. (A month later, sexual assault allegations arose, which Sulaimon says were unrelated to the dismissal.) Now the 6-foot-4 guard heads to a once-hated rival—one that needs him to perform. When motivated, Sulaimon is a quick, strong defender who can break down a defense late in the shot clock and bury 3-pointers. It's up to Terps coach Mark Turgeon, who has known Sulaimon since he was 13, to bring that back out of him. If he succeeds, Maryland has its best shot at a title.

### **RASHEED SULAIMON YEAR BY YEAR**

	POINTS PER GAM	E
2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
11.6	9.9	7.5

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
MPG	29.2	25.6	19.3
T0%*	12.6	13.0	18.9
FT%	80.2	76.8	66.7

<sup>\*</sup>TURNOVERS PER POSSESSION, PER KENPOM

# LEARN TO STOP THE PICK-AND-ROLL

The Terps won with defense a year

ago, leading the Big Ten by allowing just .993 points per possession in conference games. But there was a weak spot in that otherwise stout unit: UM struggled at guarding the pick-and-roll. According to Synergy, the squad allowed .785 points per play against the ball handler on those plays, placing it in just the 28th percentile nationally. So how will Maryland adjust this season? Freshman Diamond Stone [6-11, 255 pounds] and transfer Robert Carter [6-9, 235] should help better protect the rim against penetrating quards, and if they aren't mobile enough to hedge against screens, Turgeon can always shift senior Jake Layman to the 4. Says one Big Ten assistant coach, "That length and size will cause problems. They'll have some flexibility and versatility in their roster." And one last notion in which the Terps can take heart: Compared

to the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds in last year's NCAA tourney (see right), UM was second worst against the pickand-roll. The only team worse? Wisconsin, which, you

might recall, didn't have too bad a season.

### TERPS COMPARED TO TOURNEY NO. 1 AND NO. 2 SEEDS

PPP

SCHOOL	GUARDING THE PICK- AND-ROLL	PERCENTILE
DUKE	.617	93rd
VIRGINIA	.635	91st
KENTUCKY	.635	90th
GONZAGA	.636	89th
KANSAS	.651	84th
ARIZONA	.661	81st
VILLANOVA	.693	71st
MARYLAND	.785	28th
WISCONSIN	.833	13th





must adjust to

new roles.

# 3

### **MAXIMIZE MELO**

The case for UM's ascension starts with sophomore Melo Trimble, who might end up the nation's best point quard. But while Trimble led the

team in points and assists last season, he didn't bear the burden of leadership thanks to then-senior Dez Wells. "Whether it was a big shot or a defensive play, Dez was that guy who stepped up," says the rival coach. "Who will replace that grit and ability to finish games?" Wells not only was the team's backbone but shined in the biggest games. Against KenPom's Top 100, Wells averaged 14.4 ppg and hit 54.2 percent of 3-pointers. Trimble has shown a similar impulse: Last season his scoring rose against top-100 foes, and nowhere was his value more evident than in the Round of 32 loss to WVU: After tallying 15 points and seven boards in the game's first 31 minutes, Trimble left with a concussion, and WVU quickly took control. Hopefully, this year will be less about his head—and more about shouldering the load.

### **MELO TRIMBLE VS. TOP TEAMS**

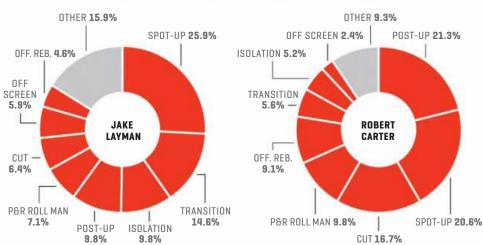
<b>VS. TOP 100</b>		VS. OTHERS
16.7	← PPG →	15.6
34.5	⊢ MPG →	32.4
44.2	⊢ FG% →	44.7
41.2	<b>⊢3PT% →</b>	41.3

# SCORE IN THE PAINT—BUT STILL SPREAD THE D Don't let last season's 28-7 record fool you: Buckets came hard for UM, which ranked

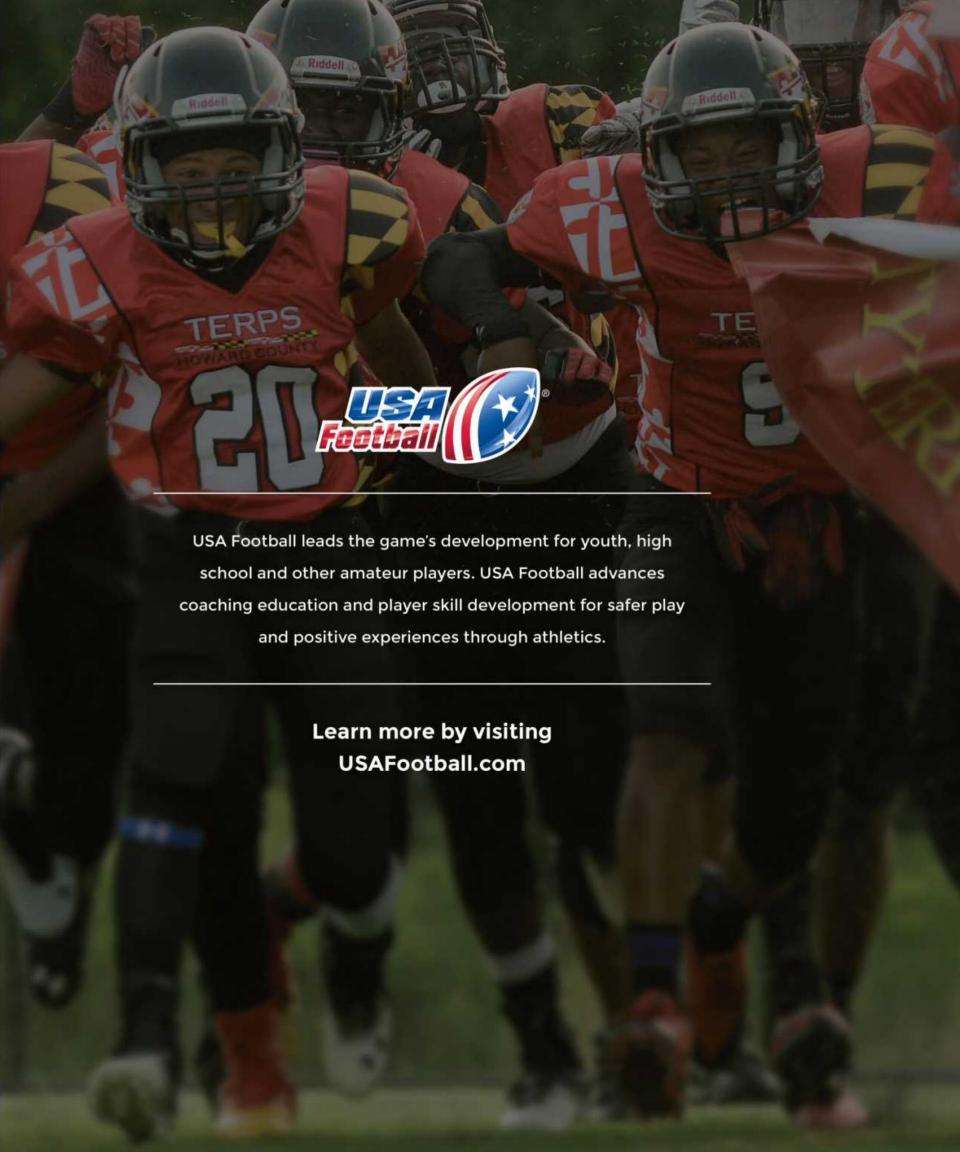
Don't let last season's 28-7 record fool you: Buckets came hard for UM, which ranked 10th in Big Ten play with an adjusted 101.7 points per 100 possessions. That was partly because the Terps lacked an inside scoring presence: They posted up just 6.6 percent of the time. But that should change this year with new guys Carter and Stone, the No. 6

recruit in his class slotting in at center. Carter averaged 11.4 ppg and 8.4 rpg two years ago at Georgia Tech and should start at power forward, sliding 6-9 Layman to the wing. That lineup should bully teams inside, as long as Stone and Carter hit enough jumpers to keep opponents from packing the paint. If not, Turgeon might need to stagger their minutes and use Layman as a stretch 4. Either way, the two new bigs are the biggest reason the Terps are ranked No. 1. Figuring out how to use them? That's the only way the Terps will stay there.

### POSSESSION DISTRIBUTION FOR MARYLAND POWER FORWARDS\*



\*LAYMAN'S STATS FROM 2014-15 SEASON, CARTER'S FROM 2013-14 AT GEORGIA TECH, COURTESY SYNERGY





Heads Up Football® is a USA Football program designed to create a better, safer game through important standards rooted in education.



NFL FLAG powered by USA Football provides opportunities for children ages 5-17 to enjoy America's favorite sport while wearing NFL gear.



USA Football's FUNdamentals program introduces children to football by teaching basic skills in a fun, non-contact, energetic environment.

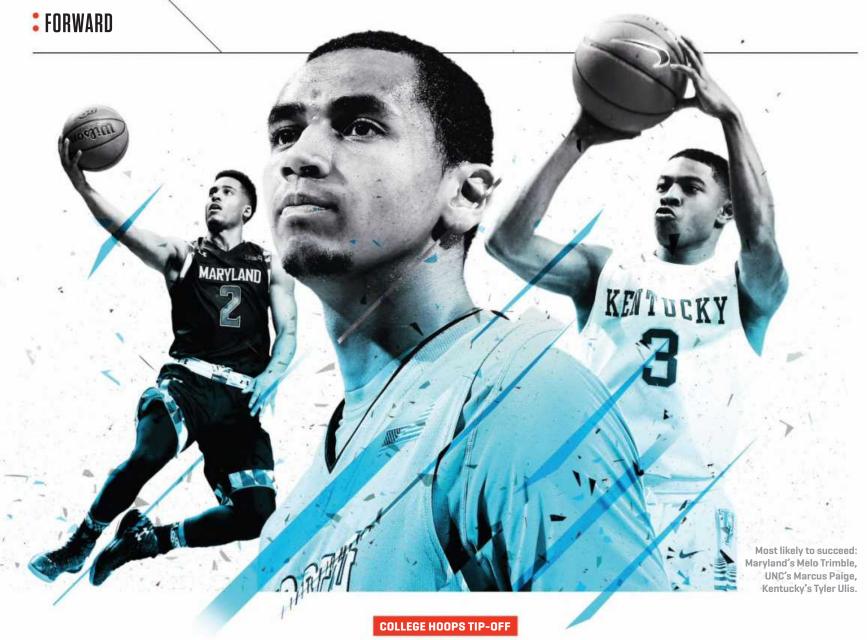


USA Football manages the U.S. National Team in Football, which represents the United States in international competitions and IFAF World Championships.



### **EQUIPMENT & FIELD BUILDING GRANTS**

USA Football is committed to enhancing the football experience of all players by awarding organizations with equipment and field building grant opportunities.



# Top 25 Power Rankings

With a list jammed with teams from the usual (hello again, UK and UNC) to the unusual (Maryland, how'd you get here?!), men's college hoops is having a moment of parity. The race for Houston starts now. Here are the lead contenders. —JAY BILAS

### 1 Maryland

LAST SEASON'S RECORD 28-7
JOE LUNARDI'S PROJECTED TOURNAMENT SEED 1

With a blend of returning starters and talented transfers, the Terps are as good as they've been since they won it all in '02. If they retain their defensive moxie [last year they held foes to 39.5 percent, tops in the Big Ten], they have Final Four talent. Still, the Terps have long been underdogs, and if No. 1 status undoes that—or if they can't duplicate last year's 12–1 record in close games—all bets are off.

### 2 North Carolina

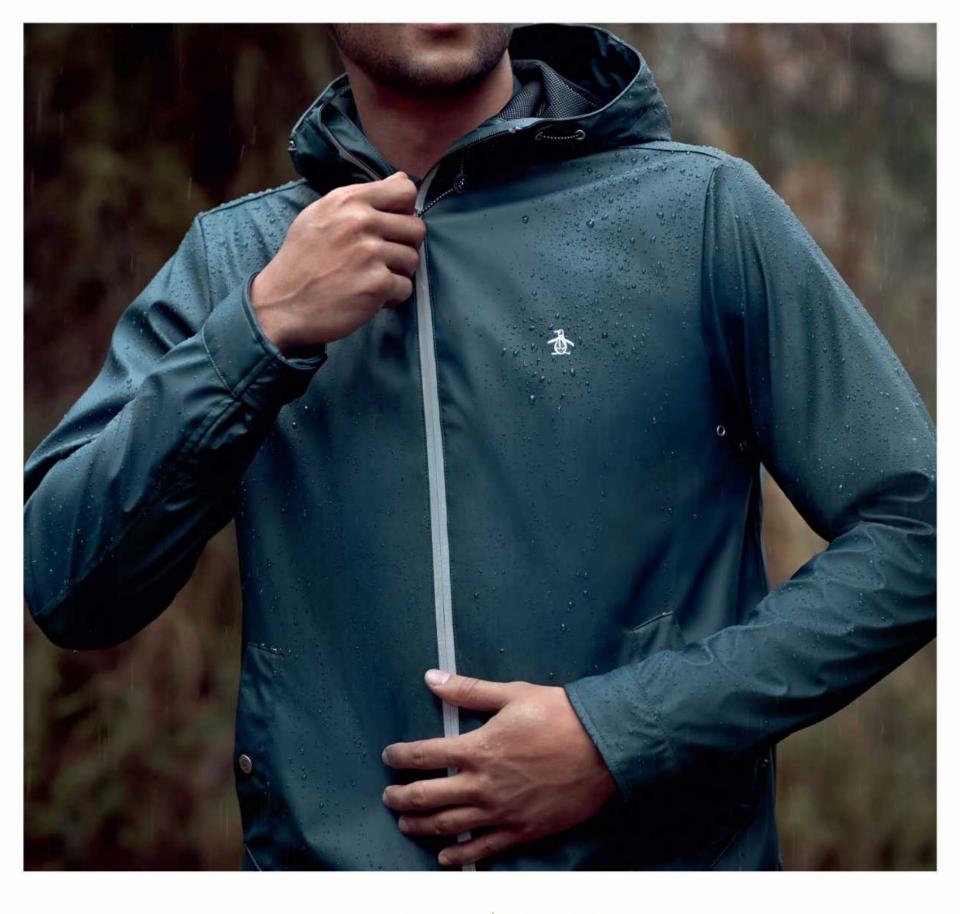
LAST SEASON 26-12 PROJECTED SEED 1

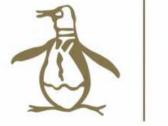
UNC returns nine of its top 10 scorers from last season's Sweet 16 team, including guard Marcus Paige, back soon from a hand injury, and a talanted crew of big men who had the country's sixth-best offensive rebound rate. But the Heels will have to attempt more than 22.3 percent of their shots from behind the arc [second lowest in NCAA] to make the most of their vast talent and depth.

### **3 Kentucky**

LAST SEASON 38-1 PROJECTED SEED 1

Last year Kentucky won 38 straight games, led the nation in almost every defensive category and owned the NBA draft. This year, if the country's No. 2 recruiting class—led by talented freshmen Jamal Murray and Skal Labissiere—jells and returnees like guard Tyler Ulis [5.6 ppg last season] play up to their lofty reps, there's no reason UK can't find its way back to the Final Four—yes, again.













Kansas might want to bring scissors to Houston.

**Perry Ellis** 

### 5 Virginia

### LAST SEASON 30-4 PROJECTED SEED 2

For the Cavs to finally crack the Elite Eight under coach Tony Bennett, they must do it with more than just the nation's second-best D. Last season UVa won because of its pace (third slowest in NCAA), not despite it. For a lengthy NCAA run, future pro guard Malcolm Brogdon must carry more of the scoring load.

### 6 Duke

### LAST SEASON 35-4 PROJECTED SEED 2

Coach K is swapping one No. 1 recruiting class for another, but this season's crop, led by forwards Brandon Ingram and Chase Jeter and guard Derryck Thornton, is different: more perimeter-oriented, less dominant inside. Can Duke win it all again? Sure. But freshmen can mean early exits. Even at Duke.

### **7** Iowa State

### LAST SEASON 25-9 PROJECTED SEED 2

Can new coach Steve Prohm fill the suit of Fred Hoiberg, now roaming the Bulls' sideline? We'll see. What we do know: This team is talented, productive [most efficient 0 in the Big 12 last year]—and fun [see forward Georges Niang's dunks, layups ... any interview ever].

### 8 Oklahoma

### LAST SEASON 24-11 PROJECTED SEED 2

The Sooners have always been able to score (and coach Lon Kruger returns six of last season's top eight, including Big 12 POY guard Buddy Hield and his 17.4 ppg), but last season they also had the sixth-best D on a per-play basis. That D must go from good to great for OU to do something special.

### 9 Villanova

### LAST SEASON 33-3 PROJECTED SEED 3

After a second straight second-round exit, coach Jay Wright has much to prove. Last season the Wildcats' offense was eighth in the nation in O-rating and ninth in points per play. They're more balanced with a new trio of talented freshmen, which could lead to their first Final Four appearance since '09.

### **10** Wichita State

### LAST SEASON 30-5 PROJECTED SEED 3

WSU boasts arguably the nation's top backcourt in Ron Baker and Fred VanVleet (first and fourth in O-rating in the MVC last year). Still, the Shockers' identity under coach Gregg Marshall is rebounding and D, so senior transfer forward Anton Grady is key.

### 11 GONZAGA

LAST SEASON 35-3

### 12 CALIFORNIA

LAST SEASON 18-15 PROJECTED SEED 4

### 13 ARIZONA

LAST SEASON 34-4 PROJECTED SEED 4

### **14 INDIANA**

LAST SEASON 20-14 PROJECTED SEED 3

### 15 MICHIGAN STATE

LAST SEASON 27-12 PROJECTED SEED 4

### **16 VANDERRIIT**

LAST SEASON 21-14 PROJECTED SEED 9

### 17 WISCONSIN

LAST SEASON 36-4 PROJECTED SEED 4

### 18 UTAH

LAST SEASON 26-9 PROJECTED SEED 6

### **19** LSU

LAST SEASON 22-11 PROJECTED SEED 5

### 20 SMII

LAST SEASON 27-7
INELIGIBLE FOR TOURNAMENT

### 21 CONNECTICUT

LAST SEASON 20-15 PROJECTED SEED 10

### **22** MICHIGAN

LAST SEASON 16-16 PROJECTED SEED 7

### 23 GEORGETOWN

LAST SEASON 22-11 PROJECTED SEED 6

### 24 PURDUE

LAST SEASON 21-13 PROJECTED SEED 8

### T25 BAYLOR

LAST SEASON 24-10 PROJECTED SEED 6

### T25 BUTLER

LAST SEASON 23-11 PROJECTED SEED 7

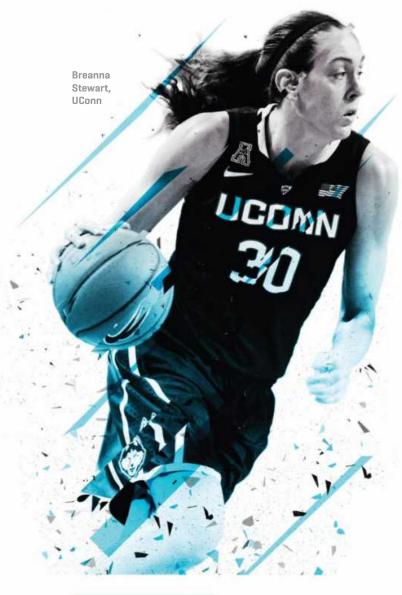
18 ESPN 11.23.2015 PETER G. AIKEN/GETTY IMAGES





TO FOLLOW THE 2015-16
SEASON—AND UCONN'S QUEST
FOR A FOURTH STRAIGHT TITLE—
VISIT ESPNW.COM

### : FORWARD



**COLLEGE HOOPS TIP-OFF** 

# Women's Top 10

The 2016 Final Four will be the third held in Indianapolis ... which, somehow, is not one of the eight cities in which 10-time champ UConn has claimed a title. Not *yet*. This season, again, there are the Huskies—and there's everyone else. —MECHELLE VOEPEL

### **1** Connecticut

### LAST SEASON'S RECORD 38-1 CHARLIE CREME'S PROJECTED TOURNAMENT SEED 1

Last season UConn led the nation offensively, with 89.3 ppg, and defensively, allowing 48.6—an average margin of nearly 41 points. And the Huskies return four of their five top scorers, including senior forward Breanna Stewart (favored to win a third POY award). No D1 women's team has won four titles in a row. So that's another record for the Huskies to set.

### 2 South Carolina

### LAST SEASON 34-3 PROJECTED SEED 1

It was a season of firsts for the Gamecocks in 2014-15: first SEC tourney title, first Final Four, first time atop the nation in attendance. Maybe that last one is why their home winning streak could be up to 46 games when UConn visits in February. Led by senior guard Tiffany Mitchell, USC will try to make this a season of another first: an NCAA title.

### **3 Tennessee**

### LAST SEASON 30-6 PROJECTED SEED 1

Who would've thought a program with 18 Final Four appearances would go seven years without one? In that time, other SEC teams (see above) have made great strides. But with guard Diamond DeShields, a transfer from UNC, and 6-6 center Mercedes Russell, the Lady Vols should better their 71.3 ppg, which was only fourth best in the SEC last season.

### **4** Notre Dame

### LAST SEASON 36-3 PROJECTED SEED 1

The Irish lost newly minted WNBA rookie of the year Jewell Loyd, but the ACC favorites return sophomore forward Brianna Turner, who led the nation by shooting 65.2 percent from the field, and juniors Lindsay Allen and Taya Reimer. The question: Can the Irish, who've lost in the NCAA title game four of the past five years, muster the will one more time?

### 5 Baylor

### LAST SEASON 33-4 PROJECTED SEED 2

Nina Davis, a 5-11 junior forward and the Big 12's top scorer last season (21.1 ppg), deserved her All-America honors. But it's senior point guard Niya Johnson who drives the Baylor bus. Johnson led the nation in assists [8.9], was second in assist-to-turnover ratio (4.13) and should be the reason Baylor takes home its sixth straight Big 12 tourney trophy.

### 6 Ohio State

### LAST SEASON 24-11 PROJECTED SEED 2

The Buckeyes thrived with youth last season: Rookie guard Kelsey Mitchell led the nation in scoring at 24.9 ppg, and Alexa Hart was the top frosh shot blocker at 3.69 per game and third in field goal percentage [62.7 percent]. But after a buzzer-beater loss in the second round, the goal now should be a longer postseason stay to pair with a Big Ten title.

### **7** Oregon State

### LAST SEASON 27-5 PROJECTED SEED 3

The Beavers ended an 18-year NCAA drought in 2013-14 and last season posted a program-record 27 wins—thanks in large part to Pac-12 POY Ruth Hamblin, a 6-6 center who shot 58 percent from the field. Hamblin's return, along with those of All-Pac-12 guards Jamie Weisner and Sydney Wiese, is why OSU earned its first preseason Pac-12 nod.

### 8 Florida State

### LAST SEASON 32-5 PROJECTED SEED 2

Last season's regional final loss to South Carolina will be fresh in FSU's mind, and point guard Leticia Romero and center Adut Bulgak should help the team challenge for ACC supremacy. The Seminoles don't allow foes many second chances, but they give themselves plenty: They tied UConn for second in the nation in rebound margin at 12.3 last season.

### 9 Louisville

### LAST SEASON 27-7 PROJECTED SEED 4

The Cardinals' predicted third-place ACC finish puts them just where they like to be: under the radar. Louisville boasts a young team (one redshirt junior, the rest sophs and freshmen) with loads of potential. Forwards Mariya Moore [13.4 ppg] and Myisha Hines-Allen [11.8] were Louisville's top scorers as rookies, and both could end up All-ACC this season.

### 10 Maryland

### LAST SEASON 34-3 PROJECTED SEED 3

After an undefeated conference season and second straight Final Four, the Terps will again battle for the top spot in the Big Ten. Theirs is a veteran group, led by four seniors and the junior guard-center combo of Shatori Walker-Kimbrough and Brionna Jones. The hurdle? Overcoming the loss of point guard Lexie Brown, who transferred to Duke, and her 13.3 ppg.

20 ESPN 11.23.2015 REINHOLD MATAY/AP IMAGES

# Just one pill a day. All-day, all-night protection from frequent heartburn.



ONLY THE PURPLE PILL®
Gives you
Nexium Level Protection.®

LEARN MORE at Nexium24HR.com



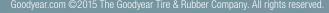


EVERY TEAM HAS A TRADITION THAT INSPIRES SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE. AND FOR THE LAST 60 YEARS, WE'RE PROUD TO SAY THE GOODYEAR® BLIMP IS THE ONE THEY ALL HAVE IN COMMON.

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A TRIP TO THE GOODYEAR COTTON BOWL CLASSIC AT ESPN.COM/GOODYEAR

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Void where prohibited. Open to legal residents of the (50) U.S. & DC, who are (18) or older, or the age of majority in their state of residence, whichever is older, at the time of entry. To participate, entrant must be a member of ESPN.com or one of Sponsor's family of sites (e.g., ABC.com, ABCNEWS.com). Membership is free. Starts 10/15/15 at 12:00 p.m. ET. Ends 12/7/15 at 11:59:59 p.m. ET. Visit ESPN.com/Goodyear for Official Rules, which govern, and complete details. SPONSOR: ESPN Internet Ventures, New York, NY 10158.

Goodyear.com ©2015 The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. All rights reserved.







# Australian Rules Basketball

Melbourne native Ben Simmons could have played anywhere in the world. So how did the top-ranked freshman end up in Baton Rouge?

BY DANA O'NEIL

### : FORWARD



ickoff between Auburn and LSU is still two hours away, but the main artery around Baton Rouge's Tiger Stadium is barely passable. As four towering basketball players

try to snake their way through the masses, a man passes by, his long hair spilling from under a white baseball cap, an LSU T-shirt wrapped across his barrel chest. Without breaking stride, he folds his hands in prayer and casts his eyes upward, as if to the heavens. Instead, he's staring up at Ben Simmons, the 6-foot-10, 19-year-old freshman who has traveled from Australia to resurrect LSU from its swampy hoops grave.

"Please, God," the LSU fan says, "just beat the hell outta everybody this year."

There have been a few saviors in high-tops here before—Pistol Pete, Shaq, Big Baby—but not like this. Simmons is the No. 1 freshman basketball player in the country, which makes him the No. 1 college player in the country, an athlete so gifted he defies a position (hybrid point center might be the most accurate). Not coincidentally, his choice to break rank from traditional college hoops powers and don purple and gold has raised more than a few eyebrows, the rumor mill percolating like a good pot of gumbo. Surely money was exchanged, critics have carped. LSU even took early criticism in May for a ticket-sales campaign proclaiming "He's Coming," alongside Simmons' No. 25.

But now that he is actually here, the revival is on in all its full-throated glory. Crisscrossing through the starstruck crowd to his seat for the mid-September football game, Simmons finally finds anonymity among the 102,320 other spectators. It doesn't last long. At the end of the second quarter, he escapes the heat, heading to the cool bowels of the stadium and running straight into the biggest man on campus, the Big Aristotle himself.

Shaquille O'Neal called Simmons "the best player in the world" when he introduced him to his Instagram followers last November. When the two reconnect, just a day after officially meeting, they bro hug in the casual way men do. Shaq says something quietly before he's pulled away by a group of girls looking for a picture. As he squats down to pose, he pauses, stretching out one long arm and tugging on Simmons' shirt, motioning





As LSU's newest BMOC, Simmons takes in a football game and hangs with the Big Aristotle himself.

for him to join the picture.

"You're the man now," he says. "Not me."

**EVEN AT A** casual pickup game on campus, Simmons and his teammates have managed to draw a crowd. Keith Hornsby, son of Bruce and the top returning scorer, is on the court; so are Tim Quarterman, the junior who has played himself into a top pro prospect, and Antonio Blakeney, a McDonald's All American.

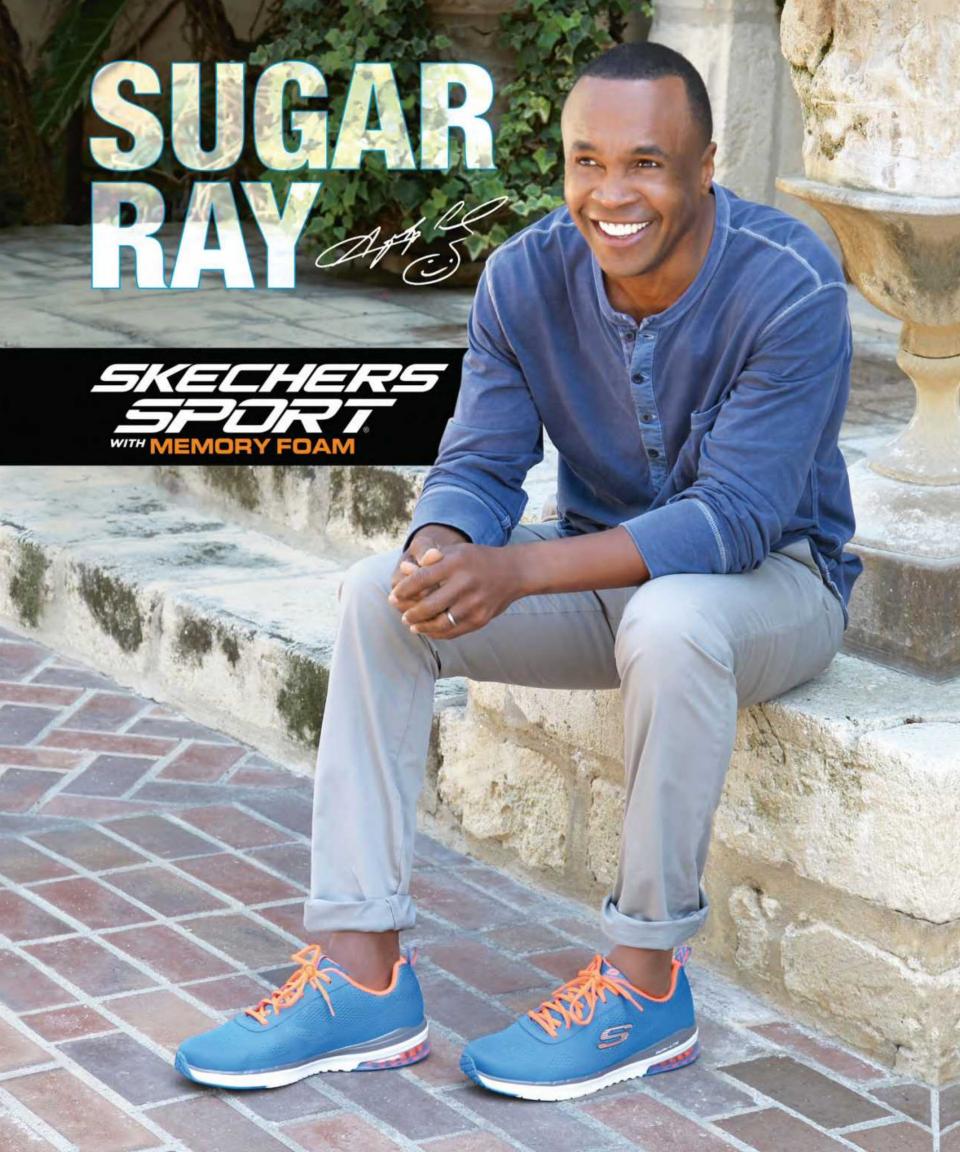
But all eyes are on No. 25.

Simmons stands on the wing, dribbling and waiting for an open seam. He finds his crease,

heads toward the rim and *passes*. The no-look kick-out is brilliant, the perfect setup for a clean look as everyone else collapses toward him. On the next possession, he corrals a rebound and uncoils his legs almost casually before springing up and slamming a one-handed dunk that makes those under the stanchion shake.

In the words of Shaq: "He's the real deal. I know it."

Maybe so, but don't count on Simmons to buy the hype. Humility, after all, comes easily when you're the youngest of six. Even now, his brother Liam doesn't miss an opportunity to take a dig. "It's like when he went to the ESPYS, he's meeting all these cool people, hanging out with millionaires," Liam says. "He's like, 'I saw J.J. Watt. We were hanging out.' And I'm like, 'Dude, J.J. Watt



### **GEICO**



### C'MON MAN

You let go of the ball before crossing the goal line...
C'MON MAN!

You didn't set aside 15 minutes to see if you could save 15% or more on your car insurance...even bigger C'MON MAN!

See how much you could save at geico.com

\* FORWARD

is not your friend. You don't have any money. Mom wants you home by 10."

"Yeah, I didn't really get away with anything," Simmons says. He pauses, perhaps realizing his siblings will read this. "Well, I mean I got away with some things."

Growing up in Melbourne, Simmons hardly felt like a prodigy among his siblings. He'd always get picked last when the kids chose sides for a game, for instance. The man? The real deal? No, he's Benny, the runt of the family who was stuffed in the car like an extra pair of sneakers, packed off to watch someone play something somewhere.

Melissa, Emily, Liam and Sean are mom Julie's children by a first marriage. Julie, a divorced single mother, was working as an aerobics instructor in 1991 when she met Dave Simmons, a Bronx-born basketball player recruited to the Melbourne Tigers, the local pro team. Three years later, they married and soon added Olivia and Ben to their brood.

The age gap between the kids is huge—Melissa is 15 years older than Ben—but it's the only one dividing the family. They are inordinately close, raised as brothers and sisters, not half this or half that. "They helped him grow up," Julie says. "He's an easygoing, quiet kid, but he also has a cheekiness to him."

The kids were athletic, with all but Emily following in their dad's basketball footsteps. (She chose rowing.) Liam, 13 years older than Ben, remembers returning from college to find his baby brother dressed in his Allen Iverson gear, a boxful of sweatbands at the ready, waiting for someone to take him to play. Usually Liam or Sean did, the big brothers filling in the gaps when Dad was on the road with his own basketball career. They taught Ben as their father taught them—pass first, score second. Dave's own game, honed by the legendary coach Abe Lemons at Oklahoma City University, was built more on force than finesse, but years overseas in the 1990s turned him into a convert. He preferred the way Europeans played, welcomed the fluidity of movement and appreciated the art of the assist. Simmons' deft ballhandling and savvy playmaking? That's all from Dad. "I still think I'm a better passer," Simmons says of his own skills. "I can score when I want, but I enjoy passing the ball more. It's one of those things where I can see a play happen before it happens. I get excited."

Among his peers, Simmons has always been better than good. At 4, he played with 7-year-olds; at 7, with 12-year-olds. At 16, he was on the Australian national team. But Australians

don't place the same focus on youth sports as Americans. Weekdays are for school, weekends for sports, summers for leisure. Simmons split his allegiances between Australian Rules football and basketball, spent his summers fishing and swimming. There were no recruiting services to chart his exploits, no YouTube clips of him slicing and dicing as a toddler.

That's why for years Simmons and his good buddy Dante Exum, now a point guard for the Utah Jazz, existed in relative anonymity. Exum's father, Cecil, played with Dave on the Melbourne Tigers, and the boys grew up together, shagging rebounds after games, having sleepovers and playing on various teams together. When Exum was drafted by the Jazz in 2014, the fifth overall pick, he was a virtual mystery man. "It's not crazy over there," Exum says. "It's just not."

Crazy can do things to kids, make them jaded before they hit high school, feel entitled before they've achieved anything. Not in Simmons' case.

"I didn't have people in my head," he says, "no one but my family."

**ON THE FIRST** play of the Australian high school championships in 2012, Dave watched his 15-year-old boy score on a reverse layup.

"Didn't know he could do that," he thought. Then Simmons dunked a tip-in. "Or that."

He turned to his lifelong friend, David Patrick, for confirmation.

"That's not normal," Patrick assured him. Patrick first met Dave when he was playing with the Australian junior national team and working out against the Melbourne Tigers. Simmons became a mentor and, eventually, de facto family. When Ben was born, Dave and Julie named Patrick his godfather.

By 2012, Patrick had traded in his playing days for a coaching career at Nicholls State and Saint Mary's and was working as a scout for the Houston Rockets. When he returned to Australia to see his godson play for the first time in years, he was blown away. Simmons' talents, he was certain, would translate beyond Australia. So he phoned an old connection—Dinos Trigonis, who runs the Pangos All-American Camp, an invitation-only showcase near Los Angeles. Patrick called in a favor, begging Trigonis to give up a coveted roster spot for his godson.

It paid off. By the end of camp, Frank Burlison, a recruiting guru with more than 40 years of experience, wrote this about Simmons on his site: He is only 15 years old, a member of Australia's

# Saving People Money Since 1936



GEICO has been serving up great car insurance and fantastic customer service for more than 75 years. Get a quote and see how much you could save today.

geico.com | 1-800-947-AUTO | local office



				١.,	
1st	1st Round				
1					
2					
3			_	_	
4				_	
5				-	
6	<b>G</b>			_	

### 🖁 FORWARD

17-under national squad, and might have been as good a prospect as there was in camp. If he eventually relocates to the U.S. for the remainder of his high school classroom and hoops educations, pencil him onto the roster for the McDonald's All-American roster three years from now.

The kid who came as a charity-case nobody emerged as the somebody to watch, outshining four- and five-star players, even current NBA players Cliff Alexander, Zach LaVine and Stanley Johnson. "It was easy to see how good he was and how good he could be," Burlison says.

It was also enough to persuade Dave to move his son to the States. In January 2013, Simmons enrolled at the Orlando-area Montverde Academy, promptly helping the prep school to a 25-2 record and a national championship. By the end of the season, the forward had climbed into the No. 4 spot in the 2015 class rankings.

The American recruiting game was on. Thing was, Simmons wasn't interested in playing it.

SIMMONS TOOK HIS first unofficial college visit just after the start of his junior year. On Oct. 11, 2013, he arrived on the LSU campus in time for the Tigers' football game against Florida. The phone lines, per NCAA rules, had opened between coaches and Simmons just four months earlier. Official visits (school-funded) hadn't even begun.

Simmons had only half a season of American high school ball under his belt, and he didn't take part in the summer circuit, playing with the Australian U17 team instead. Consequently, college coaches were just starting to take notice. Duke and Kansas were expressing interest. And yet on Oct. 14, three days after visiting LSU, Simmons called Tigers coach Johnny Jones and said, "I'm coming."

Jones knew Simmons was planning to set up an official visit, so on the phone, stuck in traffic, he gave a no-big-deal response.

"He said, 'No, Coach, I'm committing. I'm coming to school," Jones says, shaking his head at the memory. "I was like, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa, let me pull over."

Baton Rouge is hardly a destination for basketball luminaries. Of the top five ESPN 100 players in each of the past five recruiting classes, six went to Kentucky, five to Duke and two each to Kansas, UCLA and Arizona. The last time the top player didn't choose from this group was 2010, and Harrison Barnes didn't exactly go far out of bounds with North Carolina.

LSU, meanwhile, is not so much a sleeping giant as just sleeping. Attendance barely creeps



toward 9,000 for most games, and it made its first NCAA tournament appearance in six years last season. It's been two decades since the Dale Brown heyday, which ended with the stain of scandal. Standout forward Lester Earl accused the coaching staff, most notably Jones himself, of paying him to play there in 1996. The NCAA cleared Jones, Earl apologized and Brown's replacement, John Brady, even managed to take LSU to a Final Four in 2006. But two years later,

SHAQUILLE O'NEAL

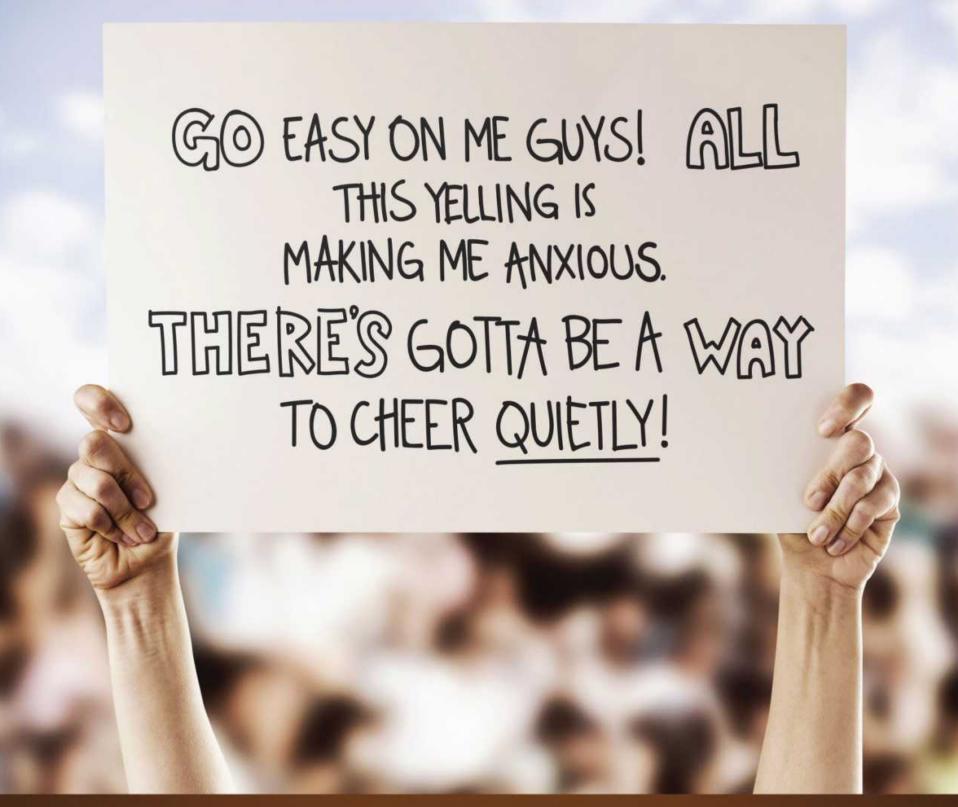
Brady was fired following an 8-13 start.

When Simmons announced his intention to attend LSU, his Twitter feed erupted with allegations. Some were more colorful than others, but the thread was common: "People say I got paid," Simmons says, shrugging off the accusation with a laugh.

But why else would he choose LSU?

Almost immediately after the Pangos basketball camp, David Patrick, Simmons' godfather, received a yearlong suspension from the NBA for violating the no-contact rule during the lockout. (Patrick says he was merely talking to an Australian player he has known for years.) Out of work, he started considering his options. Three weeks later, Patrick landed at LSU as an assistant in the basketball program. Jones, whom Patrick has known since he moved to Baton Rouge for his final year of high school, persuaded him to come.

In NCAA parlance, godfather-turned-assistantcoach sounds conveniently like the beginning of a package deal. But while Patrick insists he didn't want Simmons to feel obligated to follow him to



YOU'RE NOT YOU WHEN YOU'RE HUNGRY.®





LSU, yeah, he felt confident that his godson would pick the Tigers. Better than any other coach, he knows how Simmons is wired. He knew, in fact, that other coaches would have a hard time even reaching Simmons. The kid doesn't answer phone calls if he doesn't recognize the number.

Even more, Patrick knows the importance of family in the Simmons world, and Ben's is spread quite literally across the globe. Mom, Dad and Melissa are in Australia; Liam is an assistant basketball coach at Southwest Baptist University in Missouri; Olivia is there with him; Emily, who is married to NFL running back Michael Bush, splits her time between Louisville and Scottsdale, Arizona; Sean is in Los Angeles. And Patrick is in Baton Rouge. That was absolutely a selling point.

Sending their kids away for college isn't new to Dave and Julie, but what Ben is about to go through is. He may have emerged from the high school pool of piranhas seemingly unscathed, but now he's jumping into the deep end, the cesspool of agents and hangers-on all looking for a piece. "I have a lot of concerns," Dave says. "I'm not big on all this hype. So far he's managed it quite well, but he has to stay focused."

This summer Simmons walked out of his campus apartment to find a van full of people with armloads of gear for Simmons to sign. "Creepy, very creepy," he says. He called Patrick, who called the campus police, who made the people go away.

"I'm his godfather," Patrick says. "Not guardian or whatever that word means today. It's real."

Ultimately, Simmons says, he wanted to go where he was most comfortable. "People don't realize that," he says. "They think it was for some other reason. It was just school and family."

Plenty of people tried to persuade Simmons to look at other colleges, especially after his junior year ended in another national championship and he had a breakout summer on the camp circuit. Simmons starred at the LeBron James Skills Academy, shined in his first AAU experience with Florida-based Each 1 Teach 1 and found himself slotted as the No. 1 player in his class by September 2014. More top college coaches came calling, suggesting he reconsider his nonbinding verbal commitment. Instead, at 1:30 p.m. on Nov. 12, 2014, Simmons made it official and signed a letter of intent with LSU.

By the end of the season, Simmons' last at Montverde, the Tigers had the biggest prize in the 2015 recruiting class. Simmons won yet another national title, was named Gatorade National



Player of the Year, Naismith High School Player of the Year, Morgan Wootten Player of the Year and a McDonald's All American, and he made even conservative recruiters trek in hyperbole.

"I'm not saying he's as good as LeBron," Burlison says, "but I don't think there has been anyone at this age, with his size, who can do so many things so well, with or without the ball, since James."

**ONE AFTERNOON THIS** September, Jones blows the whistle to start a preseason workout. Simmons grabs a ball at half court, turns to the basket and

heaves a shot. He doesn't really try, doesn't leave his feet, barely puts any muscle behind it, and the ball is dead-on, falling shy of the rim but grazing the net on the way down.

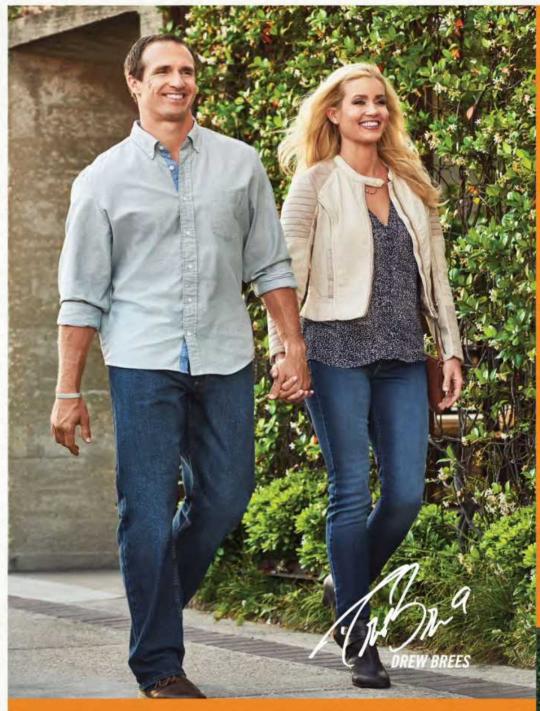
Minutes later, the players divide for drills. On one end are the big men, oafishly trying to dribble a basketball in each hand. On the opposite side are the guards, scooting the ball between their legs, crossing over and around cones placed in a zigzag on the floor. Simmons is here with the guards, not where he belongs at 6-10. His movements are fluid and relaxed, without a hint of hesitation or awkwardness. But there is one thing that separates him. When they finish the drill, most pull up for a soft jumper. Simmons goes to the rim for a backboard-rattling stuff.

This is what it has all added up to—the sibling ribbing and the parental guidance, the risky debut in California and the coming-out party in Florida—a player so complete, so advanced, yet somehow nonplussed by it all.

"It's still just weird to me," he says. "When people say stuff like, 'You're one-and-done, No. 1 pick,' it sounds so crazy, even though in reality it could happen. Like I could put on an NBA jersey and play against LeBron, KD, the greatest players in the world. I feel like yesterday I was talking about it with my best friend in grade nine."

That dream is now tantalizingly close, probably just months away. But first, the unlikely prospect from Down Under will have to prove himself to the rest of the world from an even unlikelier place—Baton Rouge.

30 ESPN 11.23.2015 GREGORY PAYAN/AP IMAGES



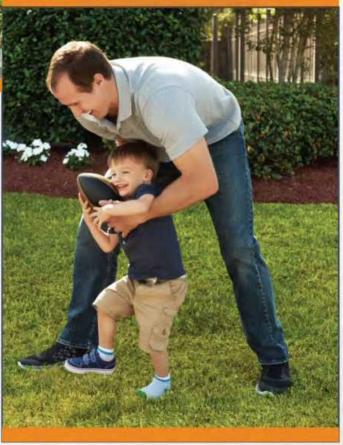
# ADVANCED COMFORT JEANS

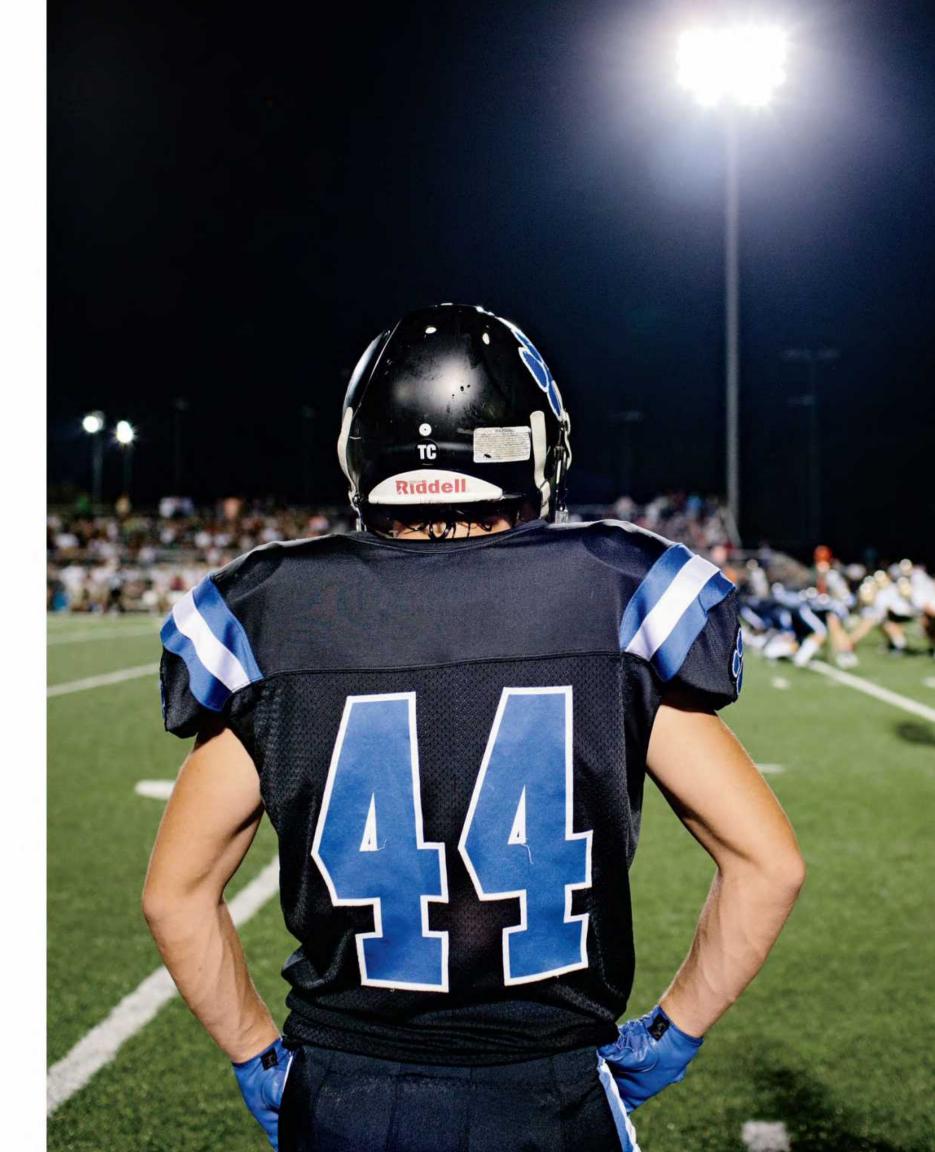


# COMFORT ANYTIME ANY WEAR



Wrangler.com Real. Comfortable. Jeans.







# "Why Him, Why Me?"

Two tragic collisions on the football field, separated by 26 years, have brought together a high school linebacker and a former college running back in search of the answer to a life-altering question.

### BY ELI SASLOW

or the first few seconds after the collision, the game continues as if nothing has gone wrong. The crowd cheers in approval. A coach screams: "Great block!" Cody Seward, 17, who delivered the hit,

stands and chases the play a few yards downfield. Only after the punt return ends does Cody turn back and notice Tyrell Cameron, 16, still lying there behind him. "Come on. Get up," Cody says, but Tyrell doesn't respond, and he doesn't move.

Soon a trainer sprints toward the players, followed by a few coaches, Tyrell's aunt and a chaplain, who huddles the group together in prayer. "Please, Lord, let this boy wake up," the pastor says. An ambulance races onto the field, its wheels digging ruts into the grass, and one paramedic cuts off Tyrell's jersey while another administers CPR. "Go, go, go!" a paramedic shouts. They strap Tyrell to a gurney and speed to the hospital. Cody walks back to the visitors sideline with 9 minutes and 11 seconds left in a Louisiana



Cody Seward (left) collided with Tyrell Cameron (above) on a punt return that would transform lives in two communities in northern Louisiana.

### : FORWARD



high school football game he no longer wants to play.

"How bad is it?" Cody asks his coach, Jason Thompson. "Does he have a concussion? Could he be paralyzed?"

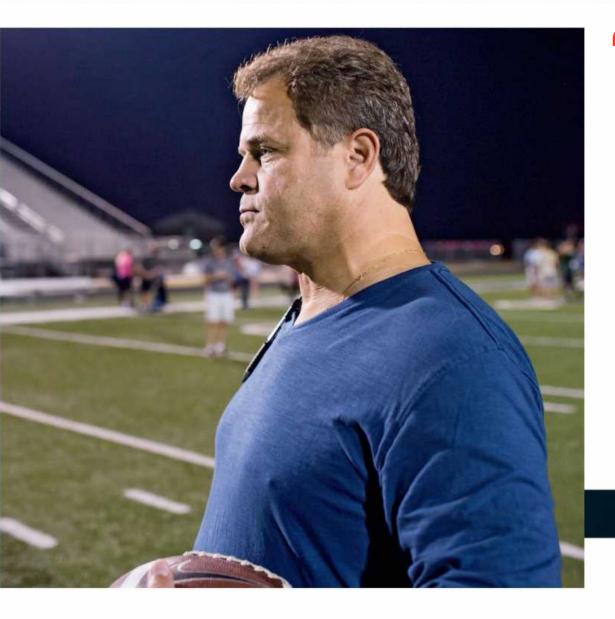
"We just don't know yet," Thompson says.

"But it can't be that bad, right?" Cody asks, because nothing about the play was particularly violent or memorable. It had been a routine block made away from the ball on a punt return. Cody is only 5-foot-5 and 145 pounds, a diminutive linebacker who had never intentionally hurt anyone: He had spent most of his childhood acting in community plays and musicals before arriving at Sterlington High School, which to his disappointment didn't offer a theater program. What it did offer was a 4,000-seat stadium with new artificial turf, a state-of-the-art weight room and a football team that serves as the cultural heart of a rural community in northern Louisiana. So Cody went out for the team, set a state record in an offseason weightlifting competition and earned his way into the defensive rotation. "All heart and hustle," the coaches say of him, and now on the

sideline of the field at Franklin Parish High, Cody wonders whether maybe his hustle had been the problem. Why hadn't he let Tyrell stumble by him? Couldn't he have relaxed on an inconsequential block in a meaningless fourth quarter? Why had he leaned into the hit with his shoulder?

The stadium remains eerily quiet for the rest of the game. Tyrell's relatives leave to follow the ambulance to the hospital, and one of them calls Tyrell's mother, who starts racing home from a family funeral in Texas. When the clock runs out, the stands are almost empty. Thompson gathers his Sterlington players onto the field. On this early-September evening, they've beaten Franklin Parish, a bigger school, 14-0. "I'm so

"I just don't want to talk about it," Seward said in the days after the hit. It took Gaines (above right), who has lived 26 years with a similar tragedy, to get the teenager to open up.



# "THERE'S NO ONE RIGHT WAY TO GO THROUGH THIS. YOU CAN DECIDE HOW TO CARRY THIS."

**BRAD GAINES, TO SEWARD** 

proud of you for this win," he says, launching into a standard postgame speech, but then someone whispers into his ear. The person has just received word from one of the medics. Tyrell had broken his neck—and never regained consciousness. Thompson turns back to face his team. "I don't know how to tell you guys this, but he didn't make it," he says. "He's dead."

Cody, kneeling at the edge of the team's postgame circle, stands, screams and starts to run. He throws off his helmet. His hands rip at his jersey. "I killed him. I killed him," he shouts. The team pastor chases him down and wraps him in a hug. An assistant coach forces him back onto his knees. "This isn't your fault," the pastor says, but Cody covers his ears and

shouts into the turf. "I killed him," he repeats again and again, until his teammates finally lead him off the field and into the parking lot. The rest of the players climb onto the school bus, but Cody gets into the front seat of his mother's car. "What can I say to make this OK?" she asks him, and he tells her not to say anything. They ride 65 miles in the darkness, their silence interrupted only by the beeping of Cody's cellphone.

"It wasn't your fault," the opposing team's quarterback texts.

"We will get you help, some therapy, some counseling," a mentor messages.

"Psalm 56-4: When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you," his youth pastor writes.

Cody turns off his phone, retreats into his house and takes melatonin to help him sleep. He lies on the couch until 3 a.m., replaying the collision in his mind, then finally drifts off until well after noon. A parade of visitors comes by, each one offering help in his or her own way. Cody's mother takes him to church. His friends take him out for barbecue. Thompson, one of the best defensive coaches in the state, comes over and says he has watched the videotape and studied the collision from every angle. Cody had delivered a textbook hit as his team set up a wedge block for a punt return. Tyrell had been stumbling. He had seen Cody only at the last moment. He had dipped his head at impact. "There's no reason," Thompson says. "It was just a fluke thing."

"Please," Cody tells his coach. "I just don't want to talk about it."

He stays home from practice Saturday, skips it again Sunday, and by Monday, Thompson's concern for Cody has turned to fear. On social media, there are unsubstantiated rumors that Cody is depressed, even suicidal. Thompson calls a meeting with the team's unofficial pastor, Chad Merrell, to seek advice.

"Doesn't Cody need to talk to somebody about all of this?" Thompson asks. "I don't want to pretend to know what he's feeling right now, because I don't."

"There's probably one person in the world who really understands," Merrell says, remembering another football collision, from a college game 26 years before. That hit also resulted in a catastrophic neck injury. It also left one player dead and another despondent—blaming football, blaming himself.

"I think I know who can help," Merrell says.

BRAD GAINES RECEIVES a call Tuesday morning on his cellphone, which has as its screen saver a picture from that football game long ago. Every time Gaines' phone rings, every time he checks his email, there it is staring back at him—an iconic image from the worst moment of his life, 26 years ago. In the picture, Chucky Mullins' neck compresses awkwardly against Gaines' back. Mullins' arms begin to sag and his head starts to droop. The memory of that hit always lurks in Gaines' mind, sneaking up on him a dozen times each day. "You can't ever run from it," he explains, so it feels easier to look down at his cellphone and be confronted by a picture of it.

"Hello," Gaines says now, and on the other end of the line, Jason Thompson introduces himself. Gaines has gotten several calls and emails over the past decades from strangers in times of trauma, and the frequency has increased in recent years. Seven high school players have died as a direct result of injuries in 2015 alone, and now Thompson tells Gaines about one of those: another fluke, another dead player and another survivor who seems lost.

"I know it's a lot to ask, but I thought maybe you could call Cody," Thompson says.

Gaines thinks it over for a few seconds. His schedule is already packed. He is in the middle of moving into a new home. He has a health care business, a wife and four children in Nashville.

"Why don't I just come down there?" Gaines says.

A few days later, he leaves in the evening to









drive 460 miles and meet a 17-year-old stranger in Sterlington, Louisiana. He has always liked driving at night, when the roads are quiet and he can hear himself think. "My therapy time," he calls it, and he finds himself returning to the same memories. "It's like I'm always trying to fit the pieces of a puzzle together in my head. Why him? Why me? Why couldn't we both walk away? Why were we chosen?"

He drives through fields of white cotton and rolling hills dotted with poplars and elms until he comes into Oxford, Mississippi, its hulking white football stadium so familiar to him from that October Saturday in 1989. It had been homecoming in Oxford, and Gaines and his Vanderbilt teammates emerged out of the locker room to a frenzied pregame crowd that dumped cups of Coke over the opposing players' heads. "Let's shove it down their throats," the Vanderbilt coach had instructed, and Gaines and his teammates marched down the field on the first drive. Gaines, a wingback, went out on a short passing route on a third-and-goal and made the catch near the end zone just in front of Mullins. The defensive back leaped into the air and dipped his head, planting his helmet in the middle of Gaines' back and making the tackle. Mullins collapsed to the

ground, arms and legs flailing in all directions. He couldn't feel his hands or fingers. Four of his vertebrae were broken. He was airlifted to a hospital in Memphis while Gaines went back to his own sideline, so nauseated he thought he might throw up.

Two hundred and forty miles away from Sterlington now. Gaines continues out of Oxford and drives into Clarksdale, birthplace of the blues, with its faded brick juke joints. "Some places get stuck in time," he says, tucking a pinch of chewing tobacco into his mouth.

He had gone to visit Mullins in the hospital a few weeks after the collision, even though Gaines' coach warned him it was a bad idea. "I have to know what he thinks of me," Gaines told his coach then, so he drove to Memphis on his Christmas break and took the elevator to the intensive care unit on the fourth floor. He was wearing his Vanderbilt letter jacket, and the hallway was filled with Ole Miss fans who had come to Memphis for a bowl game. "Why wouldn't they blame me for being the reason he's in here?" Gaines wondered. "Couldn't I have run a different route? Couldn't I have ducked when he hit me?" He walked into the hospital room and saw Mullins lying flat on his back, his body

36 ESPN 11.23.2015 BOTTOM RIGHT: MONICA HUFF/THE FRANKLIN SUN

By the time Tyrell's mom, Shamikka, arrived at the hospital, her son's uniform and beloved cleats were in a box labeled "personal effects." Since Tyrell's death, Franklin Parish has found many ways to commemorate a young life devoted, and lost, to football.

withered to 125 pounds and his head bolted in place so all he could see was the ceiling. Gaines considered backing out of the room before Mullins saw him but instead stepped up to the bed. "I'm so sorry for all of it," he said, introducing himself. Mullins motioned for Gaines to lean toward him. A surgery had taken away Mullins' voice. "It's not your fault," he whispered.

They became friends in the months after that, talking on the phone every few days and often discussing football. Mullins asked Ole Miss to set up a special phone line that would broadcast live sounds from the team's practice field. That way he could dial in each afternoon and hear the familiar soundtrack of his life: whistles, shouts and collisions. He missed the game in the same way he missed the person he had been.

Gaines, meanwhile, had started skipping his practices, avoiding the sport that had defined so much of his worldview. His dad had played in college. His uncle had won a Super Bowl with the Steelers. Two of his older brothers had already made it to the NFL, and that's what Gaines seemed destined for too. He finished out the season after Mullins' injury with "no fire for the game, no passion, just faking it," he said, yet still managed to lead the SEC in receptions. Then, early the next year, he left the team. Every play felt to him like a potential catastrophe. Every defender reminded him of Mullins. He stopped attending any games and rarely spoke to his family about the hit. "When I thought about football, all I could think about was what was happening with Chucky," Gaines says. The screws in his head. Those ghostly arms. The get-well bouquets wilting away in his hospital room. The smell of antiseptic. And then, in spring 1991, the call Gaines received from Mullins' guardian. "It was a blood clot. He's on life support. Come fast."

One hundred miles left to Sterlington, and Gaines presses down against the accelerator on

an empty two-lane road, trees blurring into the horizon, picking up speed.

He'd driven to the hospital to stand vigil for Mullins during those last three days, after doctors could find no evidence of brain activity. He had stayed up with him into the night, then slept in his old Buick in the hospital parking lot. On the last day, he had watched as the nurses removed the tubes, screws, heart monitors and breathing machines and then propped Mullins into a reclined position, placing a football in the nook of his limp arm so he could take his final breaths. Gaines had stayed in the room until the official pronouncement, then sprinted down the hallway, out of the hospital, off to a distant helipad, down into the woods and out onto a country road. He needed air; he needed space. And 24 years later, he was searching for it still.

Sixty miles away now, well after midnight, and his car is alone on the road. He had made so many lonely drives like this, including dozens to Russellville, Alabama, to visit Mullins' grave three times each year. He always goes on Christmas Day, on the anniversary of the hit and on the anniversary of Mullins' death to weed the ground and polish the gravestone. It began as a ritual of obligation, or even guilt, but for the past few years he has gone for his own reasons. His wife can't quite understand it. His children never make the trip with him. "It's almost a relief to be there," Gaines says, because he thinks about Mullins at least 20 times each day. "I'm carrying this around all the time, and finally I'm not alone with it. I'm in a place where the gravity is totally understood."

He arrives in Sterlington a few minutes before 2 a.m., checks into a roadside motel and sends a text to Cody.

"Hey bud, see you in the morning. I might get more out of this than you do."  $\,$ 

**THEY MEET AT** the Sterlington football field and go out for lunch. "Thanks for coming, sir," Cody says. He seems nervous, and now Gaines feels anxious too. If he had spent 26 years trying to understand his own collision, how could he help Cody make sense of his in a few short hours? Rather than offer advice, he decides to listen. They talk about the fried chicken. They discuss Eminem. Cody brings up his girlfriend, whom he met at a local haunted house after a football game.

"Girls and football," Gaines says, and they both laugh.

It has been a little more than a week since the collision, and Cody has tentatively returned to the Sterlington football team, unsure what else to

do. "I have to at least try it," he says. His friends are connected to the team, and so is his routine and his identity, and all of that just seems like more to lose if he quits playing. He had spent his first practice back in the coach's office, sitting on a couch and watching video of the hit. What everyone had told him seemed true: It was a clean block, unremarkable, a fluke. "I know I didn't do anything wrong," he says, and so he has gone back to being a linebacker and back to his place on the punt return team, even though the new anxiousness he feels sometimes manifests in chills and sweats. He can still deliver a hit. He can still make his reads on defense. "The old Cody," coaches have begun saying of him, but the game feels different.

He has been taught at Sterlington to play football with joy and controlled adrenaline but also with solemnity. He and his teammates lift weights in the offseason under the picture of a gigantic panther, its blue eyes staring down at them: "The eyes of the past, present and future are upon you," it reads. They walk into a field house where trainers have posted a motivational quote on the wall: "The measure of a man is the will to fight, and fight and then fight some more, because surrender is death, and death is for the weak." They stand together to listen to pregame prayers over the stadium loudspeaker: "Lord, protect these athletes and make them strong for their battle." And Cody has believed all of those things-has hit the weights harder than any of his teammates, cranked music into his ears before the games, bit down into his mouthguard at the first whistle and then lost himself in the delusion of the game, as the best players always do.

And yet: "Now it's kind of like I'm playing but not feeling all the things I used to feel," Cody tells Gaines. "It's still good. It's OK. But it isn't the same."

"I get that," Gaines says, because after he left the team at Vanderbilt he avoided even watching football for seven or eight years.

"I always feel like I'm going to wake up feeling better and not think about it, but it's kind of always there," Cody says.

"It takes time," Gaines says.

"When does it start to go back to feeling normal?" Cody asks.

"I don't know," Gaines says, even though he does in fact know. There is no going back. He has come to think about his life in two chapters, a before and after, and the dividing line is the hit. Mullins' former teammates became some of Gaines' closest friends. He chose health care for

#### 🖁 FORWARD

his career and named his first business after Mullins' jersey number, 38; he still hopes to open a medical center for athletes with head and neck trauma. His own son, 11, begged to play football, and Gaines spent months debating the conflicting influences in his life before allowing it. "You have to understand the rewards and the risks," Gaines told his son, and to prove he did, his boy chose to wear No. 38.

But why should Cody know any of those things now, at 17? He still drives a truck his father had given to him, and it smells like his girlfriend's perfume. He calls his teachers "sir" and "ma'am." He is a junior who has barely begun to think about where he wants to go to college, or what he might study. In the months before the collision, his only medical concern came every few weeks when he visited the team trainer to ask for extra Tylenol after his braces were tightened.

"This might be something you think about for a long time," Gaines says, simply. "You have great support and a lot of people who care about you. There's no one right way to go through this. You can decide what you need. You can decide how to carry this."

WHAT SHAMIKKA CAMERON needs in the days after her son's death is to speak with Cody. "I'd like to talk to the one who made the hit," she writes, in a message to the Sterlington football team's Facebook page, but at first Cody tells his coaches he isn't ready for that conversation. He doesn't know what to tell her. He has no idea what she might say to him.

"Whenever he's ready to talk, Mikka's ready," Shamikka says in another message, then she waits for Cody to call.

Tyrell had been the oldest of her three children, with big eyes, a goofy smile and an infectious love of football. "Show me something!" he had yelled at his teammates on the sideline, so often that Franklin Parish had turned that phrase into its motto. Tyrell had been playing since he was 10, at linebacker and receiver, and had hopes of making it at Alabama or Ohio State, the two teams he loved to watch each weekend. "All he knew about his future was that it was going to include a lot of football," Shamikka says, and Tyrell had told friends to expect a breakout sophomore year. A week before the season started, he ordered a pair of cleats online with his mother's credit card for \$143, the most expensive shoes he'd ever bought. "Boy, that's a crazy price!" Shamikka said, so Tyrell had promised to wear the cleats for at least two years.

On the day of the season opener against Sterlington, Shamikka and her family had traveled to a cousin's funeral in Texas. Tyrell stayed behind in Louisiana to play, and he inked his cousin's name next to the letters "R.I.P." on his new shoes in the moments before kickoff. Then, a few hours later, Shamikka was eating fast food when she received a series of frantic messages from her sister, who was at the game. "He's hurt," she said. And then, a few minutes later: "It's bad, real bad." By the time Shamikka drove four hours back home, the hospital had collected her son's uniform and cleats in a duct-taped box labeled "personal effects." She went straight to the funeral parlor, arriving in the middle of the night, and asked to see Tyrell.

"He was just laying there, looking pretty much how he always did, and that just destroyed me," she says. "I hated myself for not being there when it happened."

Coaches from both teams wondered whom Shamikka might blame: Herself for letting Tyrell play? His teammates for failing to protect him? Paramedics for being unable to save his life? Cody for delivering the hit? Football itself?

Instead Shamikka went back to the cab of her truck and sobbed, drove home, prayed and then posted a message on her Facebook page: "Let go and forgive. He died playing a game that he loved."

Coaches gave her a DVD of the game, but Shamikka didn't want to watch it. The medical examiner released the autopsy report—broken neck, internal bleeding—but she had her own explanation. "It's a God thing, not a football thing," she says. "There's no logic. It just happened. Now it's all about how we respond."

Days later, when three of Tyrell's teammates considered quitting football, she called and told them Tyrell would have wanted them to play. When the Franklin Parish coach asked how he could help Shamikka's kids, her 12-year-old said he wanted a jersey with his brother's number and a guaranteed spot on the team. And when Franklin Parish couldn't decide whether to postpone its next game, scheduled for the week after Tyrell's death, Shamikka insisted that the team play.

"Those kids need to be together, doing what they always did," she says. She knows football is a dangerous sport; she had once watched Tyrell collapse on the field and sprinted out to check on him, fearing the worst, even though it was only a cramp. "It's a serious game," she says. But she also believes that football had given her son close

"All heart and hustle,"
Sterlington coaches
say of the undersized
Seward, who breaks
into a cold sweat now
before taking the field.

friends, self-confidence and joy. "Getting back to football is the only way these kids are going to get through this," she says.

So on a Thursday night six days after Tyrell's death, she forces herself back into the stands to watch Franklin Parish play again. It will be a month more before she can talk about Tyrell without crying and two months before she feels well enough to return to work, but there she is sitting in the stands. "All these people coming up to me, and inside I just want to scream," she says. She watches as Franklin Parish players walk onto the field standing arm in arm with 50 players from Sterlington, who have come to support them. And then the next night, a Friday, Cody and his Sterlington teammates take the field for their game surrounded by Franklin Parish players, who have come directly from Tyrell's wake.

Tyrell's funeral is on a Saturday, and more than 200 people from Sterlington want to attend. The church is already expecting an overflow crowd, and Thompson, the Sterlington coach, doesn't want to take up seats. He asks Shamikka whether she and her family would greet the Sterlington group for 10 minutes before the funeral. They meet her in a large room at the River of Life Church in Winnsboro, Louisiana, where Tyrell's custom-made casket lies, imprinted with his jersey number. The Sterlington team gives Shamikka a donation check in Tyrell's memory. Then the players come up to her, one by one, to pay their respects.

Somewhere in the back of that line is Cody, nervous, still not quite sure what to say. He introduces himself. He starts to fumble for the right words, telling her how sorry he is, how much he'd been thinking of her, how ...

"Come here," she says, interrupting him, pulling him into a hug. Cody feels surprised, then grateful, then relieved. "It's OK," she says, and that is all she wants to tell him.

**NEARLY A MONTH** later, Cody and his Sterlington teammates host one of their biggest rivals, Ouachita Christian, and Gaines decides he wants to be there. He has been texting Cody and talking with him on the phone, and now he sets out again



from Nashville. Another 460 miles, another quiet road, and this time when he reaches Sterlington he sees lines of traffic stretching from the stadium, a mile in every direction. The school parking lot fills with cars, and so does an adjacent field. "Is everybody in Louisiana going to this?" he wonders. He parks at a barbecue restaurant down the block and follows the crowd.

By the time he climbs into the stands, they are already filled with more than 3,500 people. The band plays the national anthem. The student

section starts the wave. Sterlington players run out from the field house, rub a panther statue for luck, then sprint through an inflatable tunnel. "Ladies and gentlemen, your undefeated team, the boys in your hearts, the pride of Sterlington, here come your Panthers!" says a voice over the loudspeaker, and the metal bleachers begin to tremble and shake.

Cody runs out in his No. 44 jersey, coincidentally Gaines' old number, and for the next two hours the man traces the boy's path across the

field. Gaines spent nearly a decade avoiding football, but eventually the game pulled him back in. "If Chucky didn't resent it, why should I?" he has recently decided, especially since the game had shaped some of the most significant relationships in his life. His family now has season tickets at Vanderbilt, and sometimes he goes with his brothers. They make for a "battered crew," he says. There's Chris, 50, his ankle disfigured from a dozen football-related surgeries; Greg, 57, already receiving permanent disability payments from the NFL after 40 surgeries on his back, knee and shoulders that resulted in an addiction to prescription pain drugs; and then Brad, the youngest brother, with scars of his own. But they still sit together in the stands. They still cheer and lose themselves in the game.

In Sterlington, Gaines is on his feet to watch Cody in a tight second half, banging the bleachers in excitement after a late home-team score and then biting his lip when the win escapes the Panthers on a last-minute interception. "So close," he says. He walks onto the field to see Cody.

"Unbelievable game," Gaines tells him. "I really got caught up in it."

"Yeah, heartbreaker," Cody says, and then his family members and some of his teammates come over too, and for a few minutes they rehash it all.

Once the crowd thins, Gaines asks, "You doing OK with everything?"

"It gets better and better, and then it just kind of stays there," Cody says.

"Yeah, it does," Gaines says.

They hug and make plans to meet the next morning for breakfast, then Cody heads back to the locker room. The stands empty out. The coaches leave the field. But Gaines is still standing on the turf, and nearby two 10-year-old boys start playing catch. "Here, I'll be quarterback," Gaines says, calling for the ball, and he begins throwing passes, huddling the boys together to draw up plays on his hand. The janitorial staff starts cleaning the field. The opposing team boards its bus. "I should really go," Gaines says, and there are so many reasons to walk away: seven high school players dead in the year, Tyrell Cameron among them. Chucky Mullins long before that.

But right now it is just a football and an empty field, and he is throwing 40-yard strikes and his arm feels good. His mind is clear. The game seems simple. The boys run fly patterns into the end zone, and each time they return, Gaines tells them the same thing.

"Let's do another."

# There Will Be New Blood

Seats are heating up at Power 5 programs just as a generation of Group of 5 coaches emerges. Hang on for what might become the most dizzying coaching carousel ever.

#### BY TRAVIS HANEY AND RYAN McGEE



Beckman one week before the Illini played a down, and the bodies haven't stopped falling since. Programs have handed out walking papers (Maryland's Randy Edsall, USC's Steve Sarkisian and Miami's Al Golden), lost coaches to midseason retirement (South Carolina's Steve Spurrier and Minnesota's Jerry Kill) and received a onemonth notice (Virginia Tech's Frank Beamer). As of Nov. 1, eight FBS programs will play out 2015 with different coaches than they began it with—one more than the in-season exits of the past three years combined, per Stats LLC. All of this movement complicates an already complex puzzle: Who replaces whom where, and how quickly?

"There's never been a time when there were so many young coaches having success but also so many veteran, accomplished guys willing to make moves," says South Carolina AD Ray Tanner. "The challenge is, which way do you want to go? I don't think the answer is one size fits all."



#### **TOO LEGIT TO QUIT?**

Justin Fuente has Memphis rolling toward a Week 11 clash vs. AAC foe Houston. To find out if these two are truly playoff-worthy, we used FPI to project their chances to win out. Then, for good measure, we metric-ulated how they'd do against SEC West heavyweight LSU, defending champ Ohio State and both of their schedules.

	CHANCE TO WIN OUT	CHANCE TO BEAT LSU	PROJECTED WINS VS. LSU'S SCHEDULE*	CHANCE TO BEAT OHIO STATE	PROJECTED WINS VS. OHIO STATE'S SCHEDULE
MEMPHIS	8.8%	19.3%	5.4	16.7%	8.2
HOUSTON	21.1%	20.6%	5.6	17.8%	8.4

\*LSU's schedule (11 games, after Week 1 cancellation) is toughest in the FBS, per ESPN's strength of schedule calculation. All stats through Week 9. Projections courtesy ESPN Stats & Information.

40 ESPN 11.23.2015 SCOTT W. GRAU/ICON SPORTSWIRE/AP IMAGES

# THE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES ARE COMING. ET YOUR ICE-COLD IR PEPPER READY

Dr Pepper is proud to sponsor the ACC, Big Ten, Pac-12, and SEC conference championship games.



#### 🛢 FORWARD

The most common move for Power 5 ADs has been to go small (see right), filling head-coaching spots with Group of 5 candidates. But all prospects—Power 5 assistants and head coaches, NFL and FCS transplants—offer risks and rewards.

#### THE GROUP OF 5 UPSTART

#### **JUSTIN FUENTE**

These candidates bring a rep for program building. Since the start of 2014, Fuente has led Memphis to 18 wins, equaling the Tigers' previous six years combined. He's won with defense (349.5 ypg in 2014, No. 27 in the FBS) and offense (560.3 ypg in 2015, No. 6). But can a small-time coach, especially one as spotlight-shy as Fuente, shoulder a big-time workload (boosters, media)?

#### THE PROVEN POWER 5 ASSISTANT

#### KIRBY SMART

Is there a more revered assistant anywhere? Bama has had a top-five D in six of Smart's seven years as coordinator, an insane stretch that proves he can handle top talent. But even he might not be immune to the ill effects of Will Muschamp's time at Florida. Muschamp was a great DC at Texas and won a national title with Nick Saban at LSU, but his four years with the Gators were a disaster reel of every worry that plagues ADs about assistants. Can he manage a program or build a staff? Can he call a game? Unlike Group of 5 candidates, Power 5 assistants must learn on the job how to be a boss.

#### THE POWER 5 VETERAN

#### RICH RODRIGUEZ

Rodriguez is a known commodity: winner of 106 games as a Power 5 coach, four Big East titles at WVU and a Pac-12 South crown at Arizona. His price is high, but his ceiling might not be high enough. He'll win games, no question. But national titles? Not necessarily. And that's the difference between a movable, 50-something veteran and a high-risk, potentially high-reward, upstart. When ADs hire a Fuente or a Tom Herman, the hope isn't that he's the next Rich Rodriguez. It's that he's the next Urban Meyer.

#### THE WILD CARD PEP HAMILTON

When plucking from outside FBS ranks, Power 5 ADs almost always raid the NFL, focusing on one asset—a local connection. Attention, Terps: After getting his pink slip from the Colts on Nov. 3, Pep is for hire. He not only went to college in DC but spent two years running the offense at Stanford, a program that loves to target DC-area recruits.

#### **BACKGROUND CHECK**

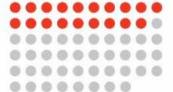
Here's how FBS programs have filled head-coaching vacancies in the past five seasons. Group of 5, beware: The Power 5 loves to steal your man.

#### **POWER 5 HIRES, 2010-14\***



#### TOP PICK

GROUP OF 5 HEAD COACH



#### THE REST

Power 5 assistant coach	17
Power 5 head coach	15
Other (NFL, FCS, etc.)	7

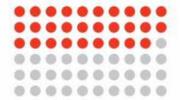
#### **GROUP OF 5 HIRES, 2010-14\***



#### TOP PICK

POWER 5 ASSISTANT COACH

29



#### THE REST

Other (NFL, FCS, etc.)	19
Group of 5 assistant coach	8
Power 5 head coach	3
Group of 5 head coach	1



\*Automatic-qualifying and non-automatic-qualifying teams pre-2014.





SCORE A VIP TRIP TO THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF AND A NEW 2016 FORD EXPLORER.





including the College Football Playoff. Four lucky fans could win VIP trips for two, and one unstoppable fan will win a 2016 Ford Explorer. Enter for your chance to win at www.ford.com/CFP.

Company, One American Road, Dearborn, MI 48126.

The new 2016 Ford Explorer is ready to tackle nearly anything,

UNSTOPPABLE NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A purchase will not increase your chances of winning. Must be legal  $resident\ of\ the\ 50\ U.S./DC,\ 21\ years\ of\ age\ or\ older.\ Void\ where\ prohibited.\ Sweepstakes\ ends$ 12/14/15. For complete entry, eligibility, prize details and odds disclosure, see Official Rules at http://fordvehicles.emipowered.net/beunstoppable/rules.html. Sponsored by Ford Motor

Go Further





# HOW TO RAISE A QB

BY PETER KEATING

"More weight!" • In *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller's classic play, the townsfolk of Salem, Massachusetts, accuse a man named Giles Corey of witchcraft, and to extract a plea from him, the authorities lay Corey in an open pit and pile heavy stones on his body, one boulder at a time. Yet Corey's only reply—to his death—is a command to bring it on: "More weight!" >

**IN THE CRUCIBLE** of today's NFL, traditional practices are crumbling away, and the weight of carrying teams is increasingly falling on younger and younger quarterbacks. But instead of succumbing to pressure—or the doomsaying prophecies of old-timers—the new generation is thriving.

On the Sunday before Halloween, 22-year-old Teddy Bridgewater threw for 316 yards in a Vikings win over the Lions. Blake Bortles, 23, launched a 31-yard touchdown with 2:16 left to lead his Jaguars over the Bills. Derek Carr, 24, amassed 289 yards with three TDs and no picks to lead the Raiders past the Chargers. Ryan Tannehill, drafted in 2012 by the Dolphins, pasted the Texans for four touchdowns and 44 points. Kirk Cousins, also drafted in '12, passed for three TDs and rushed for a fourth as the Redskins overcame a 24-point deficit to clip the Buccaneers—despite the efforts of 21-year-old Jameis Winston, who threw for 297 yards and two TDs. Young guns have been firing all season—and earning the trust of their organizations. Nearly half the league's teams are starting quarterbacks who were drafted in the past five years.

The average age of starting QBs across the league doesn't change much: It's 29.3 this season, compared with 29.2 in 2010, 29.1 in 2005 and, for that matter, 29.5 in 1975. Any given year will witness a familiar mix: a few superstars who are closer to AARP membership than college, a batch of stable veterans and a handful of bad clubs experimenting at quarterback with recent draft picks. The average performance of 35-year-olds will always be better than that of 25-year-olds because of something financial analysts call survivorship bias—only the best players last in the NFL for a dozen or more years. But here's what has changed: Clubs are drafting quarterbacks at earlier ages and entrusting them with more responsibility, and on the whole, they are delivering. Since 2011, nine QBs age 23 or younger have started every game in a season 10 times—a historically huge number.

One source for this youthquake is the NFL's labor deal. The 2011 collective bargaining agreement capped rookie contracts for first-round picks at four years (with a team-option fifth), which limits club expenses but compels organizations to figure out whether young players deserve extensions within their first few seasons. Franchises no longer have the latitude to let a top pick ride the bench for three years, as Green Bay did with Aaron Rodgers. Long before first contracts are up, teams must throw potential starters into the fray, watch them sink or swim and judge their future value.

Just as important, the new rookie wage scale pays young players a lot less while asking them to do just as much work. Carolina signed Cam Newton for \$22 million with the No. 1 pick just a year after the Rams spent \$78 million to land

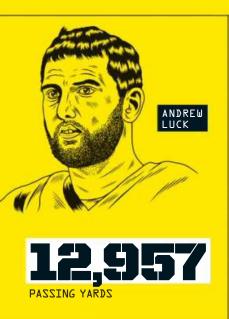


Sam Bradford. Now, consider how you would treat a \$22,000 car compared with a \$78,000 car. Less like a family heirloom and more like a rental, right? Under the current labor pact, clubs have every incentive to play young quarterbacks and play them heavily. In the five years before the CBA, rookie QBs as a group averaged 6,986 passing yards in their first seasons, with 32.2 touchdowns and 43 interceptions. In the five years since, they have averaged 12,198 yards collectively, with a TD/INT ratio of 65.8-to-53.6.

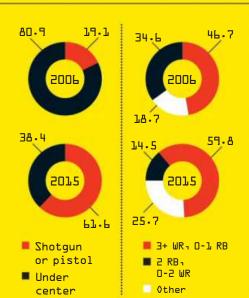
But that's not just because of changing demand. Even deeper rumbles are disrupting-and accelerating-the entire supply chain for youthful quarterbacks. Under relentless, spiraling pressure to chase the staggering revenues that come with winning, colleges are recruiting and playing QBs regardless of their age. And further down the line, prep schools and even middle schools are too. Seriously: When Zadock Dinkelmann, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound quarterback from Somerset, Texas, accepted a scholarship offer from LSU last year, he did so verbally because he couldn't make a written commitment until 2018, seeing as how he was in eighth grade.

Across the decades, the age curve for top college QBs has lurched backward even as workloads have increased. In 1961, his first year at Alabama, Joe Namath didn't play for Bear Bryant; at that time, NCAA rules restricted freshmen to their own squads. In 1979, John Elway had just 96 passing attempts as a freshman at Stanford. In 2000, Philip Rivers started 12 games and threw for 3,364 yards as an NC State freshman. In 2013, Winston had 384 attempts—nearly as many as Namath had in his entire college career-passed for 4,057 yards and won the Heisman Trophy as a teenager. Winston left Florida State after his sophomore season but by then had more than 800 passing attempts and nearly 8,000 yards under his belt. Which is just one example of how youth no longer equates to inexperience.

Moreover, young quarterbacks are increasingly gaining useful snaps, not just playing time, in the NCAA, because the pro game looks more and more like college. It's no secret that NFL offenses have opened up in recent years, but the extent to which teams have adopted what used to be called "college-style" formations might surprise you. Ten seasons ago, NFL quarterbacks worked



3. Nexta let's look at the transition away from pro-style sets in the NFL. 0-coordinators might bemoan it₁ but the rise of spread-happy offenses in the pros means more comfortable, and more productiveyoung quarterbacks.



4. Lastly, the new rookie wage scale compels clubs to start QBs at ever younger ages. They learn faster and play better.

In the 5 years before the 2011 CBA<sub>1</sub> rookies as a group averaged

**6,986** 

In the 5 years since, rookies as a group have averaged

12,198

\*2015 stats are prorated.

out of shotgun or pistol formations on just 19.1 percent of snaps; that number has jumped to 61.6 percent. Meanwhile, teams use three or more wide receivers on 59.8 percent of plays, up from 46.7 percent 10 years ago, and deploy two running backs on just 15.3 percent of snaps, down from 34.6 percent. "Three yards and a cloud of dust" doesn't really exist anymore in the NFL, unless you're talking about quarterback sneaks by Tom Brady. A revolution has taken place in plain sight, overthrowing ground and pound for the passing game in general and spread formations in particular-and scoring is at record levels. All of which makes it much easier for clubs to pluck QBs from college and drop them straight onto pro fields.

Now, there are many ways for a quarterback to burn up or burn out in the crucible of his initial seasons in the NFL. He can have off-field issues, like Johnny Manziel. He can suffer injuries, or land in a system that fails to maximize his strengths, or play for an organization that puts him behind an inferior offensive line, all of which have befallen Robert Griffin III. He can get dragged down by coaching and personnel changes, like Colin Kaepernick or

Andrew Luck. He can simply turn out to be not as good as his team had hoped, like Geno Smith. But turning any quarterback into an All-Pro has always required prospects to navigate a Byzantine and mine-strewn path. What today's era shows is that age matters less than ever in walking that road: Top-tier QBs who stay upright until their teams figure out how to surround them with talent can deliver massive production from day one. Luck, current struggles aside, threw for more yards (12,957) in his first three seasons than any other quarterback in NFL history, and Andy Dalton and Newton are fourth and fifth on the all-time list (behind Peyton Manning and Dan Marino).

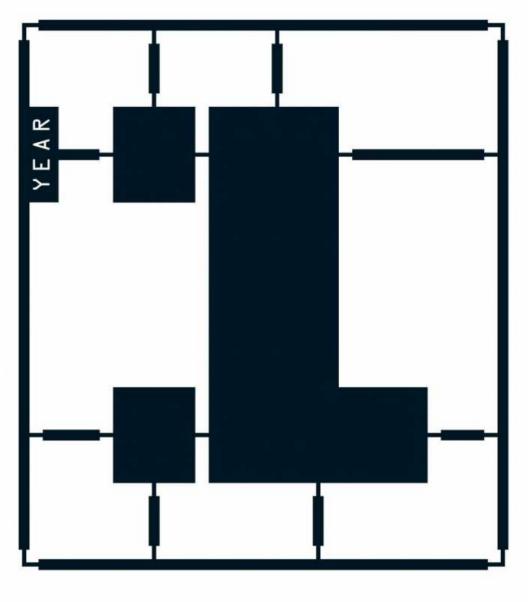
So suppose you ran the Vikings a year and a half ago and had the chance to snag Bridgewater with the final pick in the first round of the draft. Your running back is capable of rushing for 2,000 yards in a season, but he's pushing 30. Your recent experiments at quarterback included the 41-year-old Brett Favre and the 35-year-old Donovan McNabb. Looking at Bridgewater, you see a quarterback who is, yes, only 21, but who started all but two games in his three seasons at a BCS school, led his

Louisville Cardinals to a 30–9 record and threw for nearly 10,000 yards with a 3-1 TD/INT ratio. You just watched 25-year-old Russell Wilson win a Super Bowl in his second season with the Seahawks, and if you sign Bridgewater, he will make about \$1.2 million as a rookie—less than you are paying long-snapper Cullen Loeffler. Why on earth wouldn't you draft him and then play him? To see if Matt Cassel, also on your roster, will suddenly be a lot better in his 30s than he was in his 20s?

To be sure, bad organizations find ways to answer that question. For many traditionalists, it's just an article of faith that quarterbacks need time to develop at the NFL level and that young QBs are rushed into action too quickly. Steelers offensive coordinator Todd Haley recently said it's so hard to develop quarterbacks that NFL teams shouldn't even want a top-five draft pick.

Think about that. The QBs taken in the first five selections over the past five seasons are Winston, Marcus Mariota, Bortles, Luck, Griffin and Newton. That's not a group of surefire Hall of Famers; when you're looking at quarterbacks in their early 20s, there is no such group. It is, however, a collection of superior athletes offering you a better-than-even shot at a cornerstone player. When you wonder why some franchises are so resistant to change, year after year, consider that there are well-respected coaches in the NFL who would rather pass up the chance to draft a quarterback like that than take on the opportunity to build around him.

But there aren't as many traditionalists as there used to be. Half a dozen or so NFL teams are led by veteran QBs who are likely Hall of Famers. Everyone else has to choose between youth and experience. And look around: These days, it's young quarterbacks in a landslide.



# GLASS BEGINS

Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota aced the college test with Heisman-winning numbers—but nothing prepares a rookie for the NFL learning curve.

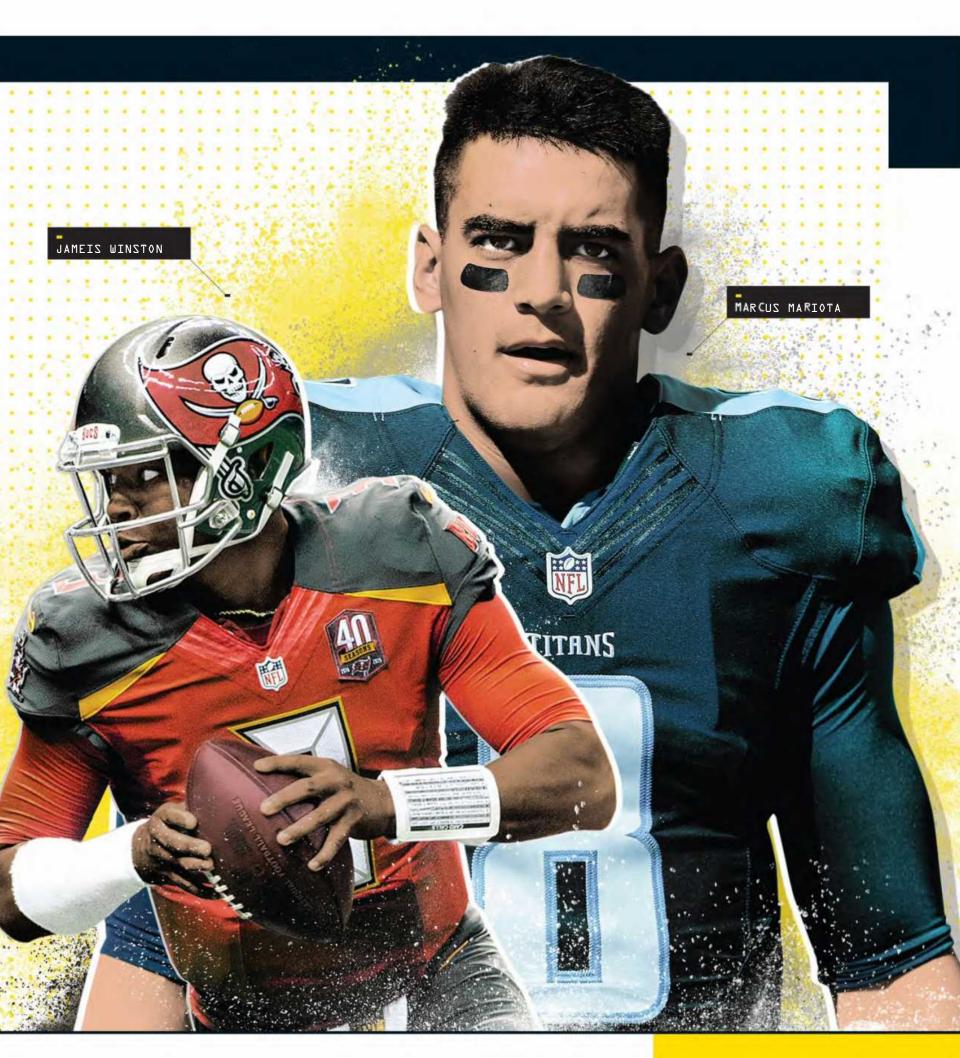
BY MATT BOWEN

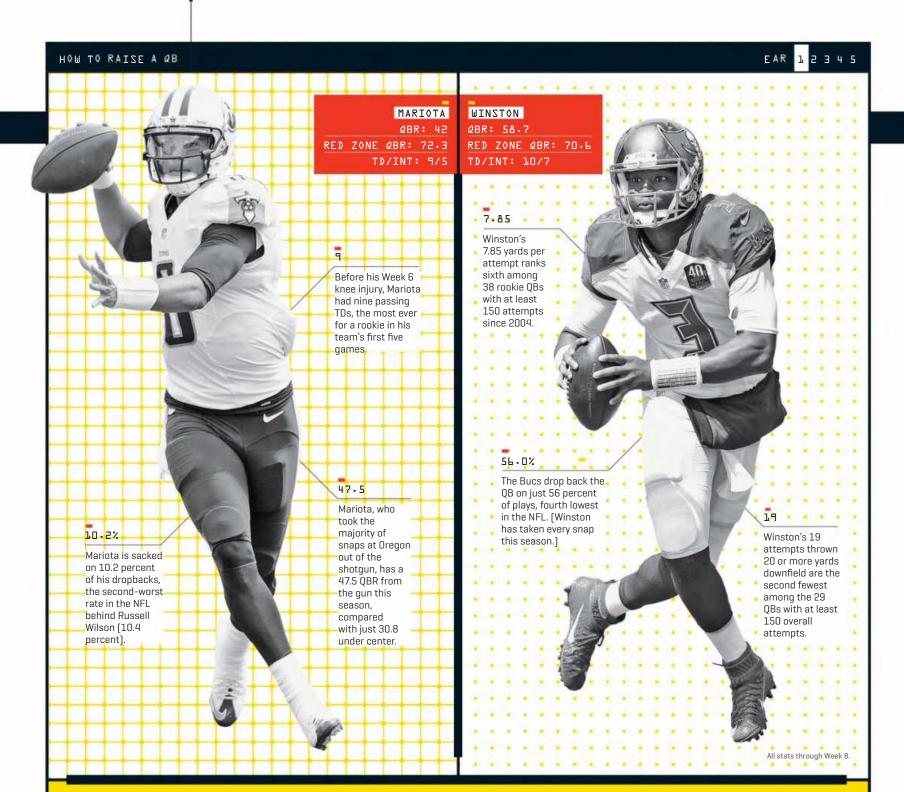
IT WAS A deep dig route. A basic pattern that Jameis Winston has thrown since high school, maybe even peewees. With the Buccaneers protecting a 9-7 lead at Houston in Week 3, the rookie could extend an early third-quarter drive with a crucial third-and-7 strike. What Winston couldn't do—with a safety trailing the route and a corner over the top—is throw to receiver Mike Evans' back shoulder. But he tried anyway.

The window was extremely tight, and the throw, the placement, the timing, had to be perfect. It wasn't. Safety Quintin Demps intercepted the ball, and Tampa Bay never scored again in a 19-9 loss.

Winston wasn't the only one to blame. Given the pervasive philosophy of win now among front offices and fan bases, Winston and the Titans' Marcus Mariota are expected, unfairly, to arrive on the biggest stage already dropping dimes and leading comeback victories. Draft a QB in the top five? Put him on the field; careers and ticket sales are tied to that young arm.

But picks, poor decisions and missed opportunities—they're all part of the standard résumé for rookie QBs who are thrown to the NFL's wolves. And ask any of the league's 32 coaches whether they truly believe a rookie can win right away and they'll tell you it's fairy-tale stuff in this grown man's league. While there is some credence to developing rookies with live-game reps—compared to the laid-back, technique-deficient





snaps on the scout team—in the case of Winston and Mariota, there's little reason to expect them to deliver a major uptick on the stat sheet, much less in the win column, over the season's second half.

According to a veteran NFL defensive coach, the plan remains simple against these rooks: Pressure with complex blitzes, multiple looks and late safety rotations, especially against Winston. He struggles to read coverages but still wants to throw to the deep middle, so defensive coordinators are eliminating the seam and inside cuts while disguising man-

under and pressure schemes—leading him into traps that Tom Brady would never step into.

Meanwhile, Mariota, despite an MCL sprain that sidelined him for a few midseason games, is a bit more advanced than Winston due to the reps he saw all camp against Dick LeBeau's defense in Tennessee. Still, the run-pass option plays that he thrived on at Oregon and early this season have been sniffed out by NFL linebackers and defensive backs. They read an offense with much more eye discipline than college kids, and their closing speed eliminates the quick, inside pop passes that burned

Pac-12 defenses. Mariota won't make a living in the pros on these packaged plays, so he'll have to become more comfortable in the pocket to develop in interim coach Mike Mularkey's pro-style system.

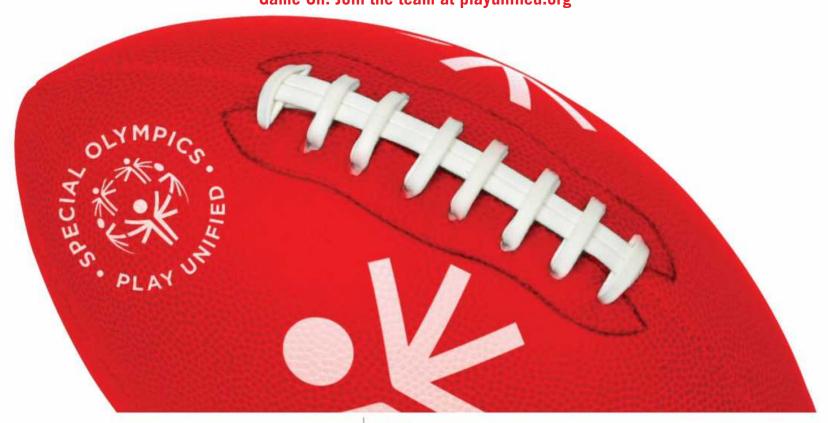
Ultimately, while film study shows that both quarterbacks are acclimating better each week, the NFL learning curve is much too steep and the talent around them severely lacking. Turn the page for insight into why there are no quick fixes for their rookie mistakes as we hit rewind and replay two costly errors from both Winston and Mariota.



# CHANGING THE WORLD IS A CONTACT SPORT.

People with intellectual disabilities are excluded and discriminated against every day. It's time we team up and take to the field to change this. Together, as one, intolerance and injustice don't stand a chance.

Game On! Join the team at playunified.org





HOW TO RAISE A QB YEAR 1

## WINSTON'S ROOKIE MISTAKES

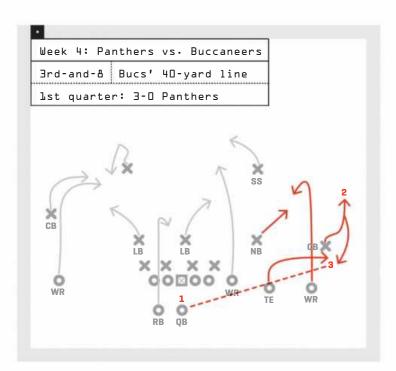


#### **DON'T TAKE THE BAIT**

Winston has executed this curl-flat route tree in Tampa's system since minicamp. But the rookie wasn't facing the pressures of live action—or a veteran cornerback such as Carolina's Josh Norman, who simply lies in the weeds, ready to strike.

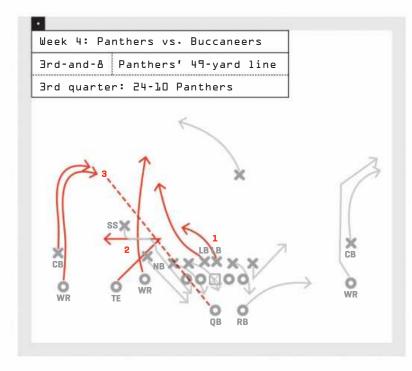
- 1 With the Buccaneers in a 3-wide/ 1-tight set, Winston can target the wide receiver on the inside seam or work the two-level read on the outside. His first read is WR Vincent Jackson on the curl, and the second is TE Brandon Myers bursting to the flat from the slot. If Jackson is open, he makes the throw. If the nickelback sinks under the curl, he comes down a level to Myers in the flat. Simple.
- 2 But Norman, a fourth-year vet, is too sneaky for that. With the strong safety sitting over the top of the seam, the corner sinks at the snap and shows
- Winston he is gaining depth. That technique, paired with the nickelback dropping to cover the curl zone, signals Winston to come off Jackson's route and target Myers. Trap set.
- 3 Winston assumes that Norman will continue to gain depth with the curl. Instead, the corner keeps his eyes inside, opens his hips to Winston and breaks downhill with NFL-level speed to step in front of the flat route. Winston, who should've checked down to the running back underneath, never sees Norman coming—46-yard house call.

LESSON LEARNED NFL speed kills. So quickly reading outside coverage—and not taking a corner's bait—is imperative for a rookie QB to survive.



#### STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE

On an obvious passing down, coach Ron Rivera's defense dials un a five-man, overload zone pressure. The goal: Speed up the decision process for Winston with the blitz-and cash in when the rookie starts to rush his reads. And it works. Winston throws his third of four INTs on the day.



- 1 Carolina shows pressure with two linebackers at the line of scrimmage. But it's a disguise to confuse the protection count. At the snap, both 'backers drop to match the wide receiver and tight end, and the Panthers blitz SS Roman Harper and the nickelback off the edge. Rivera's D is looking to take away the inside receiver's quick seam route.
- 2 Harper finds a clear path to the QB, but Winston still has time to identify open options underneath. To the strong side, he can hit the tight end running the jerk-whip route. Or he can find the running back on the weak side. See the blitz, get the ball out and move the sticks. That's how you counter pressure.
- 3 Instead of taking open underneath options, Winston panics, fails to step into his throw and targets WR Vincent Jackson on a strongside dig. Winston shows poor mechanics at the release point and throws behind Jackson at the top of the route and directly to CB Josh Norman—again.

•

**LESSON LEARNED** See pressure, be cool, scan field and go underneath.

# BRAUN Series 9

**NEW** 

Introducing the

**World's Best Shaver** 

in efficiency and skin comfort\*



Introducing the Braun Series 9

with the unparalleled efficiency of SyncroSonic™ technology. The Series 9 has four cutting elements on its fully flexible head that provides maximum comfort and facial adaptability for the ultimate close shave.

Learn more about Series 9 at Braun.com

RUSSELL WILSON SUPER BOWL® CHAMPION

\*proven on 3 day beards



CELEBRATING THE TRADITIONS
THAT INSPIRE SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE.



At the University of Iowa, the football team knows how to make an entrance. As players grasp one another's hands to symbolize strength, unity and support, they slowly march through the team tunnel and run onto the playing field at historic Kinnick Stadium, cheered by more than 70,000 fans and led by mascot Herky the Hawk and the team captains. This entrance, known as The Swarm, is a tradition begun decades ago by College Football Hall of Fame head coach Hayden Fry.

GO TO

#### ESPN.COM/GOODYEAR

TO VOTE FOR A FAVORITE TRADITION IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL.
YOU CAN ALSO ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO GO TO THE COLLEGE
FOOTBALL PLAYOFF! GOODYEAR WILL SEND WEEKLY
WINNERS TO THE 2015 GOODYEAR COTTON BOWL CLASSIC,
AND A GRAND PRIZE WINNER TO THE 2016 COLLEGE
FOOTBALL PLAYOFF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME!



OFFICIAL SPONSOR OF THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Void where prohibited. Open to legal residents of the (50) U.S. & DC, who are (18) or older, or the age of majority in their state of residence, whichever is older, at the time of entry. To participate, entrant must be a member of ESPN.com or one of Sponsor's family of sites (e.g., ABC.com, ABCNEWS.com). Membership is free. Starts 10/15/15 at 12:00 PM ET. Ends 12/7/15 at 11:59:59 PM ET. Visit ESPN.com/Goodyear for Official Rules, which govern, & complete details. SPONSOR: ESPN Internet Ventures, New York, NY 10158.

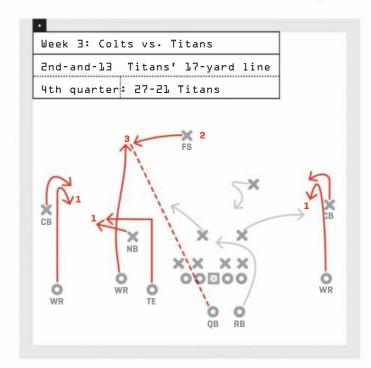
HOW TO RAISE A QB

# MARIOTA'S ROOKIE MISTAKES



#### **NEVER LOCK IN ON THE TARGET**

With a slim fourth-quarter lead on the Colts, Mariota tries to thread the inside seam to wideout Kendall Wright against a cover 3. But as the rookie learns, NFL DBs break and finish faster than anyone he saw at Oregon.



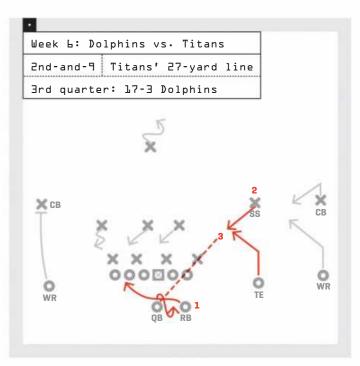
- 1 The Titans are running curl routes to both sides of the formation with a tight end on the quick outside cut. The running back gives Mariota a fourth underneath option. With the curl routes covered and the nickelback dropping to the tight end, Mariota homes in on Wright running the seam up the field.
- 2 The seam route is one of the top cover 3 beaters in the NFL, as it splits the outside corner and the safety in the deep middle of the field. But it's on the QB to look off the safety over the top.
- This is where Mariota struggles. Instead of using his eyes and shoulders to occupy Colts FS Dwight Lowery, he locks onto Wright once he has cleared the second level of the D. That's not going to cut it with just one vertical threat for Lowery to defend.
- **3** Given the game situation and the route combination, Mariota can't force this ball with Lowery in the perfect position to break on it. Just hit the safety valve underneath. But he doesn't, and Lowery picks it for prime field position in a game the Titans have literally thrown away.



**LESSON LEARNED** To throw the inside seam, a QB must manipulate the safety with his eyes to create an open window to deliver the ball.

#### **DON'T LET THE DBs FOOL YOU**

The packaged plays Mariota thrived on at Oregon have crept into the Titans' system. These run-pass options let Mariota make pre-snap reads based on numbers in the box. But NFL DBs are too quick and smart for a rookie's tricks.



- 1 This is a standard packaged play: Mariota can hand the ball off to RB Antonio Andrews or throw the quick slant (or pop) to TE Delanie Walker. With the Dolphins showing a stacked seven-man box and playing what appears to be a conservative cover 1, Mariota rides Andrews through the mesh point, then targets Walker on the inside breaking route.
- 2 Off the run-action, Mariota gets the look he wants with the linebackers attacking downhill. That opens up what in Mariota's eyes is a clear throwing lane to

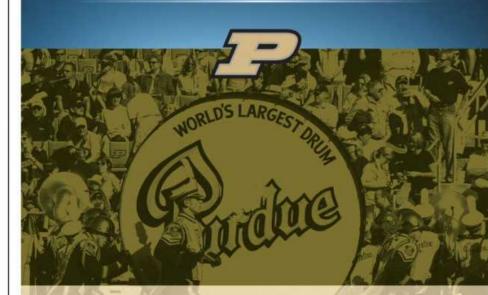
- Walker. But Miami SS Reshad Jones isn't buying the handoff.
- 3 The sixth-year safety never backpedals or allows Walker to gain inside leverage on the cut. Jones anticipates the route, drives on the throw and steps in front to make the pick. A classic case of a veteran milking a rookie miscue. Mariota has the look he wants, but NFL safeties eat up plays they recognize based on alignment, splits or backfield action. Mariota should've recognized he was caught and re-evaluated.



**LESSON LEARNED** Never assume conservative man coverage in the NFL, especially when the secondary has just two simple reads to make.



CELEBRATING THE TRADITIONS
THAT INSPIRE SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE.



Where can you find what's dubbed the "World's Largest Drum"? At Purdue University, of course. The massive bass drum has been a staple of Purdue's "All-American" Marching Band since 1921, making appearances at all home football games as well as other special events.

GO TO

#### ESPN.COM/GOODYEAR

TO VOTE FOR A FAVORITE TRADITION IN COLLEGE FOOTBALL.
YOU CAN ALSO ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO GO TO THE COLLEGE
FOOTBALL PLAYOFF! GOODYEAR WILL SEND WEEKLY
WINNERS TO THE 2015 GOODYEAR COTTON BOWL CLASSIC,
AND A GRAND PRIZE WINNER TO THE 2016 COLLEGE
FOOTBALL PLAYOFF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME!

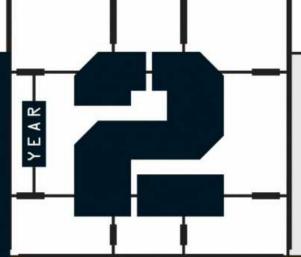




OFFICIAL SPONSOR OF THE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Void where prohibited. Open to legal residents of the (50) U.S. & DC, who are (18) or older, or the age of majority in their state of residence, whichever is older, at the time of entry. To participate, entrant must be a member of ESPN.com or one of Sponsor's family of sites (e.g., ABC.com, ABCNEWS.com). Membership is free. Starts 10/15/15 at 12:00 PM FT. Ends 12/7/15 at 11:59:59 PM FT. Visit ESPN.com/Goodyear for Official Rules, which govern, & complete details. SPONSOR: ESPN Internet Ventures, New York, NY 10158.

0



# SEGOND READS



## **BLAKE BORTLES**

JAGUARS HEIGHT 6-5 WEIGHT 245 QBR 61.4

#### THE SCOUTING REPORT

In Bortles' rookie season, the Jags were very protective of him, but they have a different philosophy this year, and he seems to have a better grasp.  $^1$  His accuracy isn't great (a little Eli-like),  $^2$  but he plays a lot with his legs and makes plays in the passing game off that.  $^3$  There's just been so little continuity with his skill players, which has limited his development.  $^4$ 

#### THE RESPONSE

#### AARON SCHATZ, FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS

1 Very different philosophy. Bortles threw just 15.4 percent of his passes more than 15 yards downfield as a rookie, the second-lowest rate among all starting QBs. This year: 29 percent, second highest behind Carson Palmer.

#### MATT BOWEN, ESPN NFL INSIDER

2 He's never been a very accurate passer or a rhythm guy like Aaron Rodgers or Tom Brady. But he's made strong strides in his lower-body mechanics—his technique and footwork.

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**3** Bortles has an elite 80.4 Total QBR on plays that occur outside of the pocket. That mark ranks sixth among all starters and shows you how dangerous he can be when he's on the move.

#### AARON SCHATZ. FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS

4 He hasn't had any less continuity than Bridgewater or Carr. Sixty-eight percent of his offensive snaps included skill players who were there last year. Bridgewater and Carr: 58\* and 47 percent, respectively.



## TEDDY BRIDGEWATER

VIKINGS HEIGHT 6-2 WEIGHT 215 QBR 61.9

#### THE SCOUTING REPORT

Teams are forcing Bridgewater to pass, 1 and he's making good throws on outs and back-shoulder fades, 2 but there are still questions with his deep stuff. 3 He struggles with some types of pressures, and he needs to improve his pocket awareness instead of forcing throws, but that's pretty standard for most young guys. 4

#### THE RESPONSE

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**1** Bridgewater ranks 28th among quarterbacks in dropbacks per game (34.4), and Minnesota is tied for fifth in rushing attempts per game (29.4). I'm not sure that can be called forcing him to pass.

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**2** True. Bridgewater actually attempts more passes per game outside the numbers [17.1] than Aaron Rodgers—and has a slightly better yards-perattempt average on those throws [6.9 for Bridgewater, 6.5 for Rodgers].

#### MATT BOWEN, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**3** Agree, yes. He has trouble with his deep-ball accuracy—his passes float too much—and he has a tendency to miss on throws when he drops his arm angle at the release point, which causes the ball to sail long.

#### AARON SCHATZ, FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS

**4** He definitely struggles under pressure. He has a 4.5 QBR when he's pressured, which ranks 24th in the NFL. And only six quarterbacks are sacked more per game.

Can't tell if your second-year QB is the real deal? We get it—with so many metrics and measurables, schemes and supporting casts, who can? We can. We quizzed scouts on the top sophomores, then asked our NFL Insiders to respond to their reports. The consensus: You're looking at one rising star, two promising prospects and Johnny Manziel.

BY MIKE SANDO



### DEREK GARR

RAIDERS HEIGHT 6-3 WEIGHT 215 QBR 65.8

#### THE SCOUTING REPORT

Derek Carr is going to be a star in this league, but management still needs to put more skill players around him. ^1 He's playing with confidence, but he still forces some difficult throws instead of taking what the defense allows. ^2 He could use more protection from his offensive line, ^3 but he's the best prospect of these second-year QBs. ^4  $^{\prime\prime}$ 

#### THE RESPONSE

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**1** Sure, but they also need to get coach Jack Del Rio to support an offense that revolves around a passing game. In nine seasons in Jacksonville, his offenses ranked in the top half of the NFL in pass attempts just once.

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**2** He's actually ahead of the curve here. He has a solid 0.8 percent bad decision rate. (BDR shows how often a passer makes a mental mistake that leads to a turnover chance.) The league average is 1.3 percent.

#### AARON SCHATZ, FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS

**3** I humbly disagree. Oakland's offensive line is protecting Carr well. The Raiders rank first in adjusted sack rate (sacks per pass attempt, adjusted for down, distance and opponent) and third in pressure rate.

#### MATT BOWEN, ESPN NFL INSIDER

4 Agree. Carr is playing the best football of the '14 class. He's a gunslinger, which can lead to trouble, but he doesn't back down from any throws. I love that quality when the situation presents itself. The Raiders have their QB.



# **JOHNNY MANZIEL**

BROWNS HEIGHT 6-0 WEIGHT 210 QBR 51.4

#### THE SCOUTING REPORT

So far this year Manziel looks like he's trying not to be Johnny Football anymore, as far as the constant scrambling and throwing it all over the place goes. In limited snaps, he's shown improved maturity and poise. And in his start against Tennessee in Week 2, he did a nice job (11.5 ypa). Even so, it would still be difficult benching Josh McCown for him. 4

#### THE RESPONSE

#### MATT BOWEN. ESPN NFL INSIDER

1 Here's the major thing: He isn't playing out of control. Even in a small sample size this season, he's not immediately looking for those escape doors in the pocket as much, and he's still showing a rare ability to create.

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

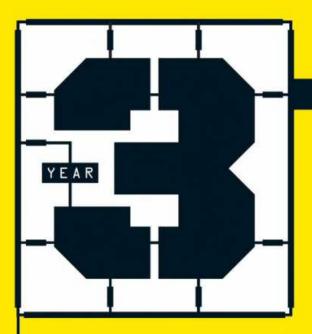
**2** It would be difficult to be *less* poised than Manziel appeared to be in his limited time last season. His 2.4 percent bad decision rate was nearly double the league average.

#### KC JOYNER, ESPN NFL INSIDER

**3** Manziel had a 75.5 Total QBR against the Titans in Week 2. It's a single game, sure, but that's near-elite territory, so it's being established that he does have a high ceiling.

#### AARON SCHATZ. FOOTBALL OUTSIDERS

**4** Cleveland's odds of making the playoffs are down to 0.3 percent. What does this team gain by playing McCown instead of giving Manziel regular-season playing time to determine whether he's the QB of the future?



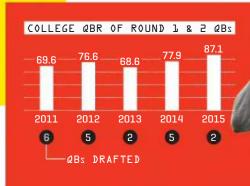
HOW TO RAISE A QB

# PASS...FAIL

It's not too early to call it: The QB draft class of 2013 is the worst of recent memory. EJ Manuel, the 16th overall pick, and Geno Smith, the second QB off the board at No. 39, have lost their starting gigs in Year 3, and there isn't anything close to a Russell Wilson type among the later picks. What happened? Here are all the gory details.—BEN ARLEDGE

#### **WHAT WE THOUGHT**

Give it up for stats: The numbers never liked these guys. EJ Manuel and Geno Smith combined for a 68.6 college QBR, the lowest among the past five classes of Round 1 and 2 QBs. NC State's Mike Glennon was the only other QB drafted before Round 4—turns out, the Jets and Bills were reaching into a very shallow talent pool.



## EJ MANUEL

Buffalo bought into Manuel's FSU pro-style pedigree, but his 74.5 QBR as a senior (26th in the FBS) foretold an NFL letdown.

#### WHAT WE SAW

A draft class' true identity can't hide after three seasons, and the verdict is in a few months early for this group. No quarterback who entered the league in 2013 is currently starting, and Manuel and Smith have combined for a dismal 40.6 career QBR, well below the other classes since 2011. The Bills averaged 7.5 wins and the Jets six over the 2013 and '14 seasons before looking for new starters in 2015.

#### ROUND 1 & 2 QBs

THROUGH THREE TEAKS					
2011	5075	5073			
WIN %	WIN%	WIN%			
50.0	49.3	37.8			
49.2	9BR <b>51.5</b>	40.6			

# WVI prej defe

#### GENO SMITH

WVU's spread did not prep Smith for NFL defenses. Since he entered the league, he is the only QB to throw at least 30 picks on fewer than 1,000 attempts.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

The Bills and Jets both overreached. Smith failed to handle pressure in the pocket and in the locker room, while Manuel was a below-average game manager (26.9 percent completion rate on throws 20 or more yards downfield, third lowest among QBs since '13). The best of the class, Glennon, was the third off the board—and he ended up with Jameis Winston's clipboard.

#### QBs TO START FROM 2013 CLASS

	ROUND/ PICK	STARTS	<b>QBR</b>
Geno Smith	2-39	29	41.8
Mike Glennon	3-73	18	49.9
EJ Manuel	1-16	16	38.6
Matt McGloin	UND	6	44.1
Landry Jones	4-115	1	43.4
Jeff Tuel	UND	1	14.4



#### MIKE GLENNON

Rather than reach, the Bucs waited until the third round for Glennon, whose 29-15 TD/INT ratio is No. 14 since '13, despite his facing a blitz on 38.9 percent of dropbacks (an NFL high).



#### **LIMITED TIME OFFER WATCH SLING TV INSTANTLY FOR 7 DAYS FREE!**



**WATCH COLLEGE FOOTBALL** 

**ON ESPN WITH SLING TV** 

Tune in Saturday for **Live Sports & More** 



**\$20 TAKE** AMONTH BACK **EASY ONLINE** CANCELLATION

**ADD THE SPORTS EXTRA PACKAGE FOR ONLY \$5 MORE** 



















**WATCH OVER 20 CHANNELS FOR** ONLY \$20/mo. PLUS ON DEMAND ENTERTAINMENT



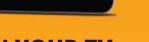












**WATCH ON YOUR TV. TABLET, LAPTOP OR PHONE** 

so you won't miss that next big TV event

START WATCHING SLING TV INSTANTLY

www.sling.com/trysling26 / or 1.888.388.2169









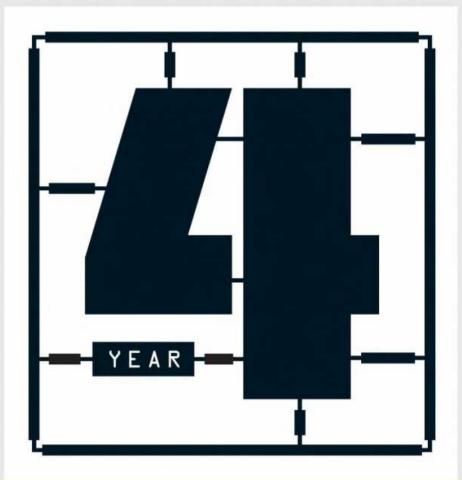






iOS nexus player

**Watch 7 Days FREE Today!** 

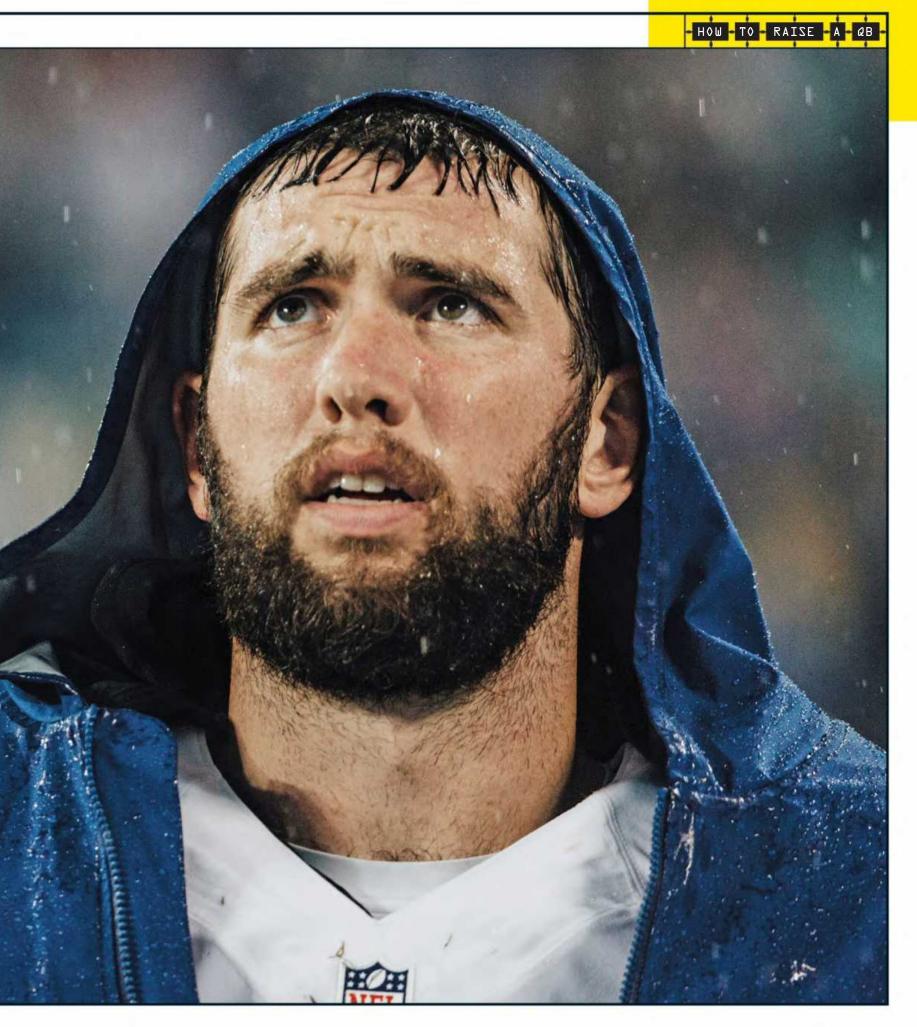


# STEP UP IN THE POCKET

Battered, beaten and besieged, Andrew Luck has never appeared more at a loss in his career. Now we'll see what he's truly made of.

BY ELIZABETH MERRILL





PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSH GOLEMAN 11.23.2015 ESPN 61



NDREW LUCK FLINGS a wet sock over his shoulder and stares at the drab carpet in the visitors' locker room at Carolina's Bank of America Stadium. His backup, Matt Hasselbeck, leans over and hands him a towel. "How'd you come out?" Hasselbeck whispers, which is what he usually asks Luck after a game to make sure he's not injured, or any *more* injured. But on this rainy night that burns into morning, Hasselbeck says it mostly as an icebreaker because he has no clue what to say.

It's the first week of November, and the Colts have just fallen 29-26 to the Panthers in overtime, Luck's fifth loss in six starts. As in most games this season, he took way too long to get going, showed flashes of his old self at the end, then reverted to 2015 Andrew by throwing another interception. This one, on *Monday Night Football*, was surely the most crushing.

Longtime Indianapolis columnist Bob Kravitz says he's never seen Luck so dejected.

Through eight games, Luck had as many turnovers as touchdowns. He's injured, maybe with some broken ribs, definitely with a bad

shoulder. Through Week 8, he had the league's lowest passer rating among starters (71.6), led the league in interceptions (12) despite missing two games and looked beaten down and mortal.

"The only thing I can say is he's trying really hard," Hasselbeck says. "He might be trying too hard."

We aren't used to seeing Luck like this. He once seemed to have it all figured out, starting as a rookie from Stanford. He led the Colts to 11-win seasons and the playoffs in each of his first three years. But now it's Year 4, and everything has gone to hell.

**PERHAPS THE BEST** place to find out what's wrong with Luck is in a sprawling building in downtown Indianapolis,

Luck threw multiple INTs in five of his first six starts this year. He had five such games in all of 2014 and one in '13.

up a flight of stairs to a nondescript office where his father, Oliver, agrees to meet. The similarities in their voices and mannerisms are uncanny. Oliver once played quarterback in the NFL too, so he gets it. Sort of. The elder Luck spent most of his career backing up Warren Moon, so he didn't exactly face the white-hot scrutiny Andrew is enduring now. But Oliver recently took a job as the executive vice president of regulatory affairs with the NCAA, and the move to Indianapolis has allowed him to grab dinners with his son and a front seat to the Colts' 2015 season. He has watched him throw interceptions, get booed, injure his shoulder and lose games.

Nothing seems to be in his son's control. External pressures he once overcame seem to be closing in on him. A Colts offensive line that was subpar from the beginning has gotten progressively worse. Offseason acquisitions that were supposed to bolster his supporting cast have been a bust. Desperation has hung thick in the Indiana air since the start of the season, and it's caused embattled coach Chuck Pagano to make some desperate moves, most notably a backbreaking fake-punt fiasco in a mid-October loss to the Patriots. Offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton, fired on Nov. 3, the day after the Panthers game, is the latest fall guy, and he likely won't be the last.

Luck's pocket, figuratively and literally, is collapsing. He's been hit more times while throwing than any other quarterback in the NFL over the past three and a half seasons, according to ESPN Stats & Information, and it's finally taking its toll. Before 2015, Luck hadn't missed a game since his freshman season at Stanford. This season he sat out Weeks 4 and 5 with a shoulder injury, and Fox Sports recently reported that he has been playing with broken ribs.

How will his body, and his confidence,



It's Yes Food. It's Oscar Mayer.

\*Except those naturally occurring in celery juice



HOW TO RAISE A QB YEAR 1 2 3

survive the rest of the season? Can he lead the team back?

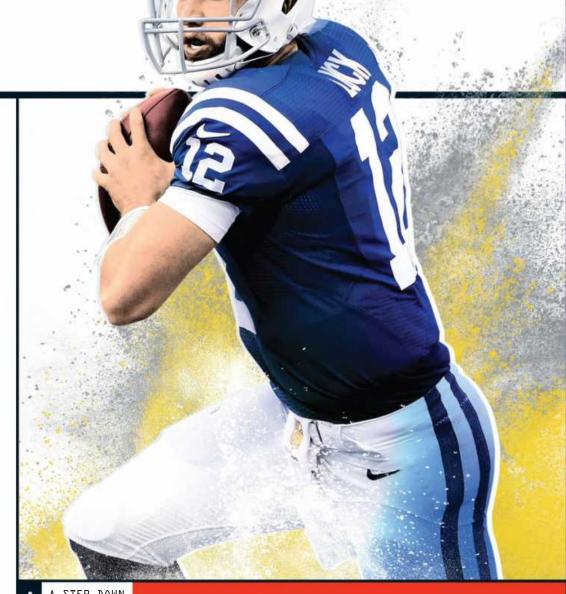
Andrew Luck says little beyond "I've got to play better," and Oliver does not want to elaborate on conversations he's had with his son about his struggles. Adversity comes through a hundred different doors, he says, and he insists his son has faced plenty of it before. NFL careers aren't linear. They're like stocks. They go up, and sometimes they go down.

"He wouldn't say [he was frustrated] even if he were," Oliver says. "Even if he did, I wouldn't tell you."

Oliver would much rather talk about what book he's reading. It sits on the corner of his desk, about one-third finished. He stole it from his son's library. It's called Rust: The Longest War, and both father and son insist it's fascinating. Oliver says rust is one of this country's most pernicious forces because it eats away at and destroys the infrastructure, the bridges, airports and railways. It's inevitable. Corrosion eventually wins.

**YEAR 4 IS** supposed to be the time when a young quarterback comes into his own. If he's lucky, he's spent much of his first three seasons behind a veteran, learning the ropes just like Hasselbeck and Aaron Rodgers did. It's also a year in which even the best quarterbacks can come under a lot of heat. Both Tom Brady and Peyton Manning struggled in their fourth seasons. Manning threw four interceptions in a game that year, and Jim Mora unleashed his infamous "Playoffs?" tirade.

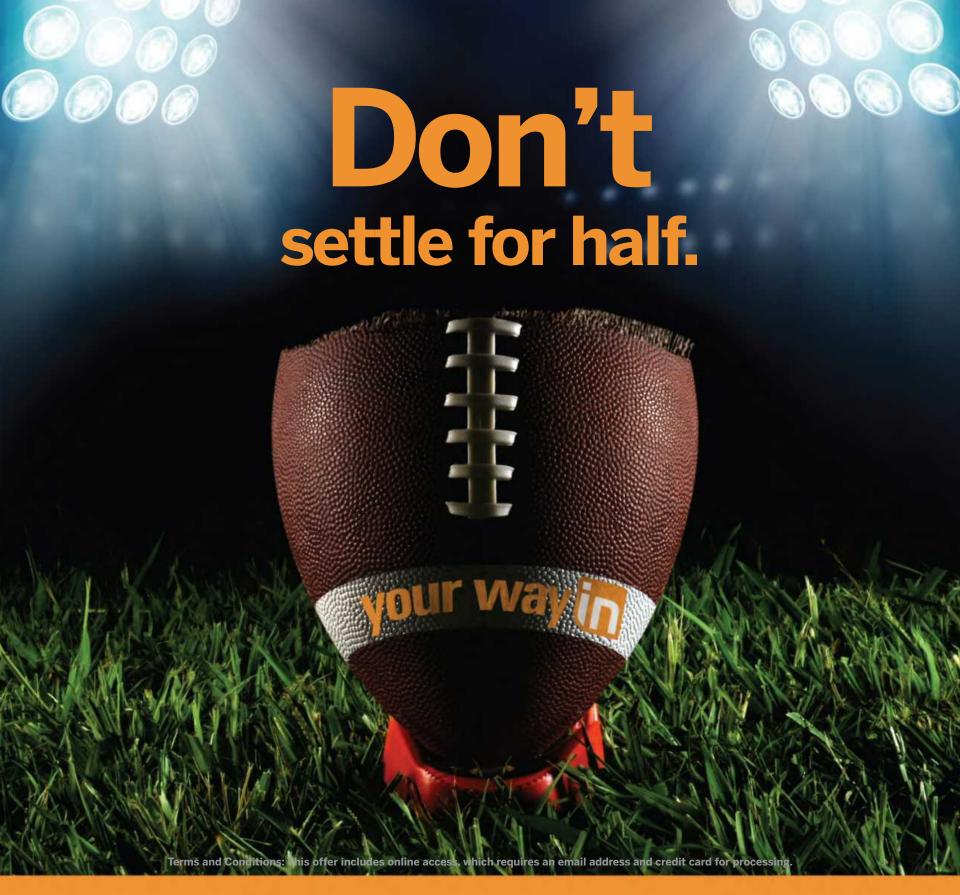
"I don't think it's like a pyramid," Hasselbeck says of a quarterback's life cycle, "like you're good, you're a little better, you're great. Sometimes you have a great year and sometimes you don't. You're so dependent on your teammates, your defense, your special teams, your offensive line,



A STEP DOWN

Andrew Luck spent each of his first three seasons leading the Colts one step closer to the Super Bowl. Now, attempting his fourth-and biggest-step, Luck has stumbled. He had outright missed 23.7 percent of his targets through Week & (fourth-worst accuracy in the NFL), and he was dead last on throws of LO-plus yards downfield (34.6 percent), where he had thrown LL of his L2 picks.





# **ESPN The Magazine subscribers:**



### Did you know?

Your subscription includes FREE Insider, the all-access pass to ESPN's premium digital content.

For full access, go to:

**ESPN.COM/ACTIVATE** 



**ESPN THE MAGAZINE** 

## HOW - TO - RAISE - A - QB

your playcaller. If you can get through a year and you're healthy and your O-line is playing well, that's nice. But that's super rare."

In many ways, Luck reminds
Hasselbeck not of Manning or Brady
but of Brett Favre. As a young player in
Green Bay, Hasselbeck watched Favre's
interception reels, and at some point
someone in the film room would always
say, "Ahhh, that was a dangerous play.
You shouldn't have done that." Then
they'd watch the touchdown reels and
say the exact same thing.

Luck's DNA is part of his problem. He's a stand-and-deliver quarterback. He takes five-step and seven-step drops, which puts more pressure on his line. He is not conservative. He is prone to mistakes, and he has success because he attempts difficult throws into tight windows.

The fact that Luck is throwing a lot of interceptions this season should surprise no one. He's always done this. But in the past, they were usually followed by 10 spectacular plays and another victory, so nobody noticed.

It's clear his injuries have affected Luck's play. Greg Cosell, a senior producer at NFL Films, believes Luck shouldn't have played in Week 6 against the Patriots because he didn't appear to have his natural arm slot with his full range of motion. "I don't think he's gunshy," Cosell says. "The larger question is, Will his body wear down sooner than later? In other words, instead of a guy who we might look at and think, 'Oh, he can play for 12 or 15 years,' is he going to be worn out in year six or seven and maybe not the same player?"

In the spring of 2014, Luck went to San Francisco to talk with mobility guru Kelly Starrett about active recovery and how to survive the constant hits in football. Starrett told him about compression socks, hydration and sleep hygiene, and Luck took copious notes. Luck has long been reading and LOST ON THE LINE

In Week 8, 40 OL positions were manned by different starters than in Week 1. Indy was one of three teams (KC1 Chicago) to have four changes; those teams were a combined 8-15. Luck's regression coincides with poor line play 1 like nearly every other QB's, and this season he had been pressured on 30.4 percent of dropbacks through Week & ninth most in the NFL and the highest rate of his career.



Average team QBR by

The top 10 teams in QBR averaged just

0.7

changes on the OL

The bottom 10 teams in QBR averaged

1.6

changes on the OL.

The league, excluding Indy, averaged

1.16

\*Comparing Week 1 starters to Week 8

researching ways to make himself better. He arrives at the team facility at 6:30 each morning just so he can complete his pre-workout routine, preparing his body for the weekly attack it's about to face.

Former Colts backup Chandler Harnish, who accompanied Luck on that trip to San Francisco, says that even before 2015, Luck played through many injuries that would have sidelined other quarterbacks.

"He's criticized for turnovers, but that guy has carried that team," Harnish says. "I think it's pretty evident he's carried that team for four years now. I think maybe the hits are starting to add up a little bit."

IN MARCH, LUCK decided to unwind by going on a USO tour. He threw a football on a C-17 as it cut through the air over Afghanistan, and he hung out with James A. "Sandy" Winnefeld, who at the time was a Navy admiral and the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"What do you do when things aren't going well?" Luck asked.

"You keep your head down, fix the problem and grind on," Winnefeld told him.

Flash forward to Week 5. Luck has to sit because of his shoulder. He hovers over Hasselbeck in a training room in Houston before a Thursday night kickoff. Hasselbeck is doubtful after getting sick from some bad chicken.

Luck stands over him. Hasselbeck has an IV in his arm. Luck buries his mouth in his shirt and simulates the choppy headset transmission.

Scrappy right cram, key left, Z-9-X Dickey Y Apache.

"Scrappy right cram, key left, Z-9-X Dickey Y Apache," Hasselbeck repeats in a daze.

They have been a perfect match, the cool 40-year-old Hasselbeck who's hanging on because he wants a ring and loves Luck, and the nerdy superstar

who's in the early chapter of his career.

Once a week during the season, the two quarterbacks go out to eat together. Luck is a big foodie who's always trying to introduce Hasselbeck to new things. The Saturday before New England, they went to a place called Recess outside Indianapolis and had, among other things, yellow fin from New Zealand. Hasselbeck was still a bit wobbly with a bad stomach, but he ate anyway.

It was hours before a gigantic matchup between two teams with plenty of ill will toward each other, but Luck didn't talk about New England, or his struggles. They laughed and relaxed and played rock-paper-scissors

to decide who paid the check.

Books are about the only things that make Luck light up when he talks these days. In late October, he offers a quick locker room review of *West of the Revolution*, a historical look at 1776—"It's a little dry"—but declines to discuss his on-field frustrations. Keep your head down, fix the problem and grind on.

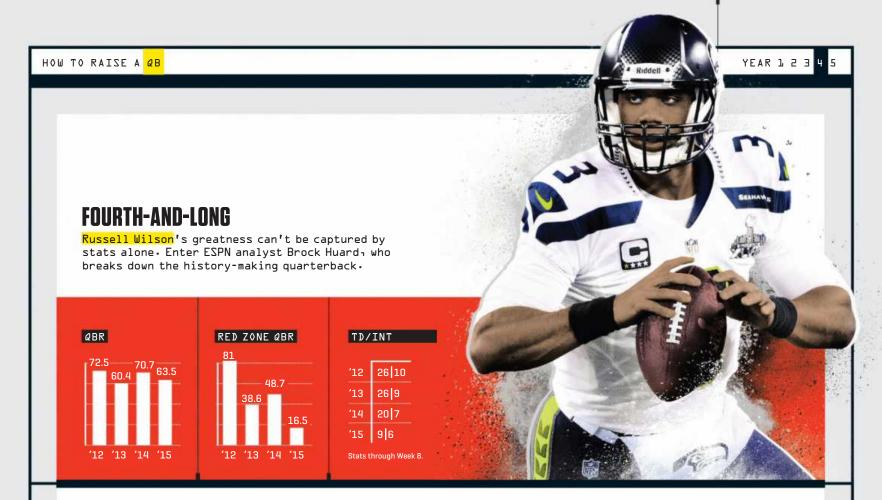
**LUCK IS THE** 10th player into the locker room after the loss to Carolina and still hasn't emerged after 1 o'clock Tuesday morning, when most of the team has headed to the buses. He puts the loss on himself. He always puts the losses on himself. As Luck showers,

Hasselbeck is asked whether the young quarterback's confidence is battered. No. "It's cliché, but people say football's a game of inches," he says. "There's a fine line, and it's not a big difference of being on the right and wrong side of that line. In 2012, this team was barely on the right side of that fine line. That team seemed to find a way to always come through. I don't know." This year the line is jagged. But it still could be headed somewhere because the Colts' division, the AFC South, is the worst in the NFL.

When Luck finally emerges from the locker room, he'll hear a story from Hasselbeck on the bus. Maybe it will be about one of his worst moments in the NFL. Hasselbeck got booed in his own stadium, and the Seattle crowd was chanting Trent Dilfer's name. Dilfer, the backup, told Hasselbeck that a similar thing happened to him when he was a starter. It made Hasselbeck feel better.

He was in Year 4.





n March 18, 2012, the Seahawks spent \$19 million for Matt Flynn to be their next franchise quarterback. A month later, GM John Schneider and coach Pete Carroll drafted a

Schneider and coach Pete Carroll drafted a fifth-year senior out of Wisconsin, Russell Wilson, in Round 3 to compete to be the No. 2. The rest, of course, is history.

Entering this season, Wilson's 68.2 career QBR trailed that of only Peyton Manning, Aaron Rodgers, Drew Brees, Tom Brady and Matt Ryan. From 2012 to 2014, he won 36 regular-season games, tied for second with Brady behind Manning and the most ever for a QB in his first three seasons. During that span, he also led the Seahawks to back-to-back Super Bowls and picked up two Pro Bowl nods. Flynn, meanwhile, was traded a year later and, after five teams and five starts since, is an unsigned free agent.

While Wilson's stats speak for themselves, what Schneider and Carroll saw in him can't be expressed through numbers. To paraphrase Schneider, who gave Wilson a four-year extension this past offseason that pays him \$21.9 million per year (second to Rodgers among QBs), the guy simply changed the temperature in the room; he made a team of veterans believe in him from day one. Sure, next-level

analytics provide more context than ever for what's going on between the lines. But success under center is still predicated on an intangible: that space between a signal-caller's ears, the fine line between fourth-quarter comeback and collapse.

"You can't compete for titles without a QB who can make plays on his own," Schneider says. "Nothing is perfect, and offensive lines are so challenged with the speed on defense right now that your QB has to create plays and function on the move. Russell does that."

Look no further than Seattle's Week 4 Monday Night Football game against Detroit. On third-and-12 early in the second quarter, no score, Lions defensive end Jason Jones came unblocked in Wilson's face-6-foot-5, 275 pounds vs. 5-11, 203 pounds. Then, as he has done many times, Wilson pulled a Houdini, ducking, darting and dashing away, then firing a 34-yard bullet to Jermaine Kearse before absorbing a vicious shot to the sternum. Instead of taking a deep breath and celebrating a first down, Wilson rallied his team to the line. He instantly recognized the Lions' coverage in hurry-up mode and dropped a perfectly thrown seam route to Doug Baldwin for a 24-yard score, Seattle's lone TD in a 13-10 win.

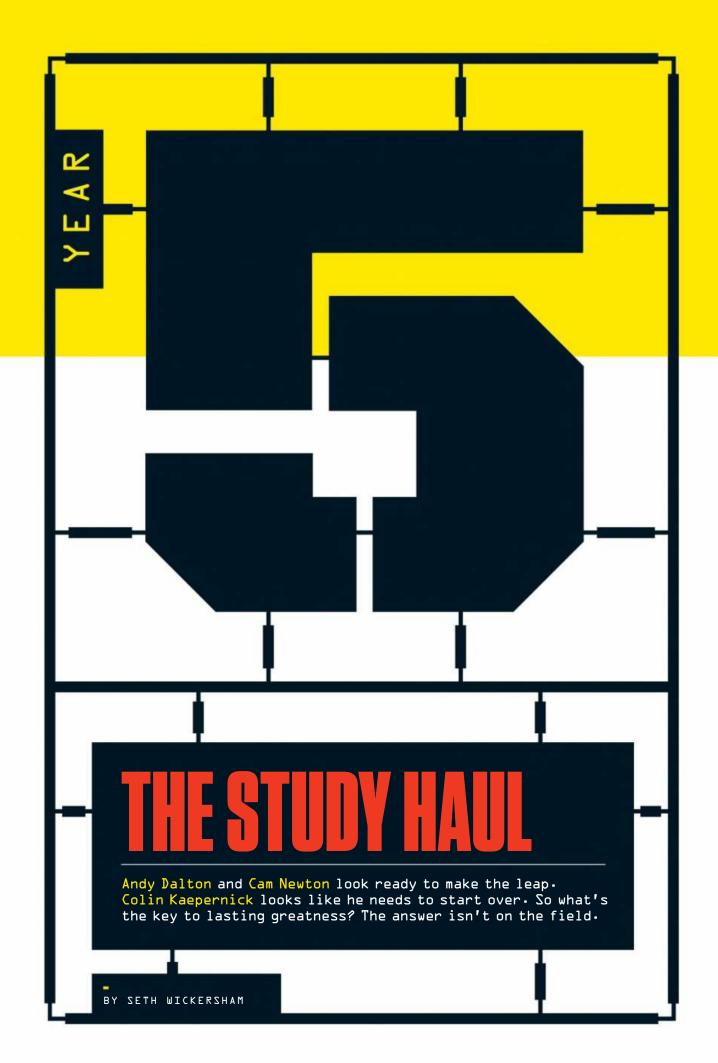
Carroll has remained steadfast in his belief, and the organization's commitment, to play elite D, run the ball and run it some more. And when executed well, that philosophy keeps the Seahawks ahead or within striking distance. In fact, their 27-17 loss at Green Bay in Week 2 was the first double-digit defeat of Wilson's tenure. But to rely on ground and pound in the NFL, you need a QB who can deliver in the clutch, à la Wilson, who engineered 15 game-winning drives over his first three seasons, the most of any QB since 2012. He earned his 16th in a 13-12 Week 8 win over the Cowboys to get the Seahawks to 4-4.

Yet the storyline out of that Dallas victory was about more than Wilson's resolve; it was the first game he hadn't been sacked. Much like his '12 classmate Andrew Luck, Wilson is facing real adversity in his fourth season. Through Week 8, despite his O-line's clean sheet at Dallas, he was sacked an NFL-high 31 times. Seattle has a piecemeal O-line that sources in the organization admit was a risky experiment. Still, under this regime, the Seahawks won't deviate from their business plan: Gamble on RBs and DBs, not a QB. That's why they took Wilson in Round 3 and monitored his progress before committing long-term.

Now it's up to him to continue to pay off.











The vented BRUTE® container makes backbreaking work easy with innovations you (and your back) will appreciate.

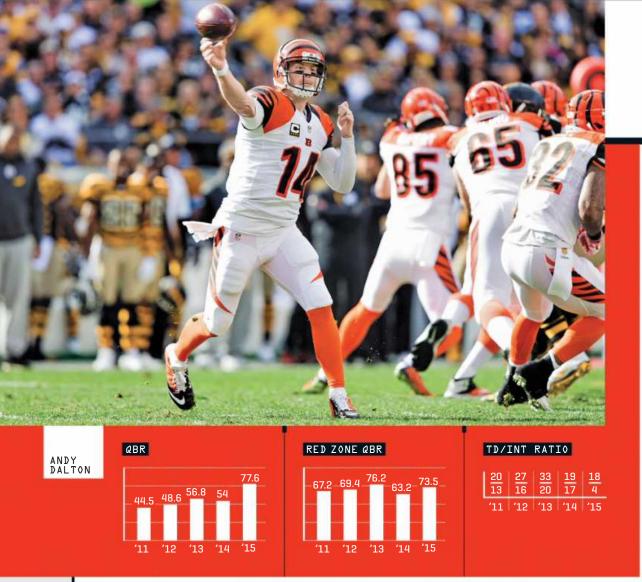






HOW TO RAISE A QB

YEAR 1 2 3 4 5



Stats through Week 9.

him first overall out of Auburn five years ago. But they could have been a curse. Because someone with those hands might have been tempted to fall back on his physical gifts without putting in the work required to be a truly great quarterback.

LOOK AROUND THE league. Quarter-backing appears to be an old man's game. By now, we know that nobody has a clue how to project the future of college quarterbacks entering the NFL, and we know that the ability to master the complexity and nuance and pressure of the position eventually distinguishes the greats from everyone else. But we really don't know a lot about the years in between, the formative years, the ones quarterbacks spend with question

marks over their heads, when they either separate themselves or don't, when they take a raw mix of doubt and talent and will try to earn what Steve Young calls "a master's in football." There is no one class, no easy road map. Each quarterback is as unique as his skill set.

Three star quarterbacks in their fifth years—Andy Dalton, Colin Kaepernick and Cam Newton—all appear to have reached turning points this season. All have endured their share of question marks and been burdened by different narratives. Dalton: the pocket guy who, in fits and starts, seems now to be figuring it all out but still must prove himself in the playoffs. Kap: once thought to be the future of the NFL but now a backup. Newton: the guy with the

potential to be the game's most dangerous player. But these narratives obscure the most fundamental truth about trying to become a great NFL quarterback: It's a messy and mundane and insanely frustrating process, and the payoffs from one's labors don't necessarily appear all at once. You just hope they do so before it's too late.

#### "F--- YOU, ANDY!"

It's hard to tell whether Andy Dalton hears the Bills fan yelling at him. Dalton is smiling as he runs off the field at Ralph Wilson Stadium after swapping jerseys with Buffalo defensive end Jerry Hughes, his old teammate at TCU. For the past three hours, in a perfect Buffalo mix of snow, rain and sunshine, Dalton tore apart the Bills, throwing for three touchdowns, avoiding every sack attempt, reading Rex Ryan's defense fluently. The 34-21 win in Week 6 kept the Bengals undefeated—they are now 8-0-and solidified Dalton's place in the MVP race. The performance furthered a conventional wisdom forming around the league: that Dalton, after four straight seasons of playoff one-and-outs, is suddenly different.

Of course, the word on Dalton has always been that the crucial moments are too big for him. Clutch is innate, not learned, most scouts believe. And so when it came time before last season to redo his contract, the Bengals signed Dalton to what grabbed headlines as a six-year, \$115 million contract but in reality was a two-year, \$25 million deal that allows the team to cut bait after this season. A few months ago, some Bengals fans were counting down the days. When Dalton jogged onto the field in July for major league baseball's All-Star celebrity softball game in Cincinnati, the hometown

74 ESPN 11.23.2015 PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN LOOMIS

# Toast with Cinnamon!



1oz RUMCHATA + 1oz JACK DANIEL'S TENNESSEE FIRE

Visit Rum Chata.com for recipes

PLEASE ENJOY RESPONSIBLY.

RumChata®, Caribbean Rum with Real Dairy Cream, Natural and Artificial Flavors, 13.75% alc./vol. Produced and Bottled by Agave Loco Brands, Pewaukee, WI 53072. Please Enjoy Responsibly. RUMCHATA and CHATA are Registered Trademarks of Agave Loco, LLC. JACK DANIEL'S and TENNESSEE FIRE are registered trademarks of © 2015 Jack Daniel's Properties, Inc. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

fans booed him. That dour welcome, so the story goes, has served as motivation this season, the clichéd chip on Dalton's shoulder that has led to 18 touchdown passes and four interceptions. Dalton calls the booing "unfortunate" because "it's not like we've had losing seasons. Yes, we haven't won in the playoffs. We get it."

But he doesn't see a dramatic change in his play so much as the natural result of years of grinding. This past offseason, Dalton worked with Tom House, one of a handful of renowned quarterback specialists, for three weeks. He says House and his colleague Adam Dedeaux helped tighten his throwing motion. It's helped him be more decisive: His average time before throwing is 2.20 seconds, second only to Tom Brady's 2.13. All of that matters more than being inspired by boos. And being in offensive coordinator Hue Jackson's system for a second straight year has allowed Dalton to switch from being left-brained—just trying to remember the language and progressions of the offense—to being right-brained, creating and anticipating holes in the defense rather than  $\,$ hoping to find them. Says Dolphins offensive consultant Al Saunders, who worked with the Bengals this past offseason, "It's like moving into a new neighborhood: First you learn how to go home, and then you realize what's around you."

It doesn't mean Dalton has arrived. It means he has improved in ways invisible except to himself, tiny measures of success. Dalton started running offensive meetings this year, elevating himself to the Brady/Manning player-coach level. Jackson says that Dalton is now "winning games with his mind" and estimates that 25 plays a game—about 40 percent—are audibles. Some of Dalton's proudest moments from this

# "A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY, 'WHAT'S DIFFERENT? WHAT'S NEW?' IT'S NOT NEW."

**ANDY DALTON** 

season aren't the obvious highlights but the hidden ones, such as checking from a pass to a run that resulted in running back Giovani Bernard's 17-yard touchdown in the second quarter against the Bills.

But development isn't linear: Late in the first half in Week 5 against the Seahawks, Dalton threw an interception to safety Earl Thomas. At halftime, Jackson had never seen Dalton so angry with himself, and he wondered whether his quarterback would struggle to flush the bad play just like in those playoff losses-and regress. Dalton's on-field demeanor was one of his main focuses with House and Dedeaux, and while House won't discuss specifics—citing the quarterback version of doctor-patient privilege-he says the main area of "significant progress" for Dalton this year is not his throwing mechanics but his body language. Sure enough, this time Dalton unspun himself quickly. "He had clear eyes, and we had clear conversation," Jackson says. With the Bengals down 24-7 in the fourth quarter, Dalton rallied them to a 27-24 overtime win. But the storyline has lingered: Is he different? "I wouldn't say there are things I'm doing now that I wouldn't have done a year ago," Dalton says. "A lot of people say, 'What's different? What's new?' It's not new. I've had success since I've been playing. I wouldn't say there's a

huge evolution." Just a culmination of many small ones.

**SLIDING INTO A** booth at a Scottsdale breakfast spot one morning in October, Kurt Warner is about to try to answer a question that has vexed everyone, inside and outside the 49ers' locker room: What the hell happened to Colin Kaepernick?

Not long ago, with a slingshot arm and a deerlike stride, Kap seemed to be football's future. He had beaten Brady in Foxborough, Drew Brees in New Orleans, Matt Ryan in Atlanta, Newton in Carolina and Aaron Rodgers twice in the playoffs. Ron Jaworski predicted he could be the greatest ever. He was the ultimate sandlot quarterback, led by the ultimate sandlot coach in Jim Harbaugh. But the cracks in his performance that began to form last year, hidden by the drama surrounding Harbaugh's job status, are fixed in sharp relief now that the coach is gone. Kap has become a football version of Chuck Knoblauch, high and low and unable to execute something that once came naturally. His QBR of 47.6 is more than 20 points lower than it was in 2012, his first year starting. New coach Jim Tomsula finally benched Kap for Blaine Gabbert after Week 8, saying he wanted "Colin to step back and breathe," a move the coach hopes will serve as



### **NEW YEAR'S SIX**

6 CLASSIC BOWLS. 2 PLAYOFF GAMES. 36 HOURS. ONLY ON ESPN.

### **NEW YEAR'S EVE**



PEACH BOWL ATLANTA, GEORGIA



(I) PLAYOFF SEMIFINAL

ORANGE BOWL MIAMI GARDENS, FLORIDA



(I) PLAYOFF SEMIFINAL

COTTON BOWL ARLINGTON, TEXAS

### **NEW YEAR'S DAY**



FIESTA BOWL GLENDALE, ARIZONA



ROSE BOWL PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

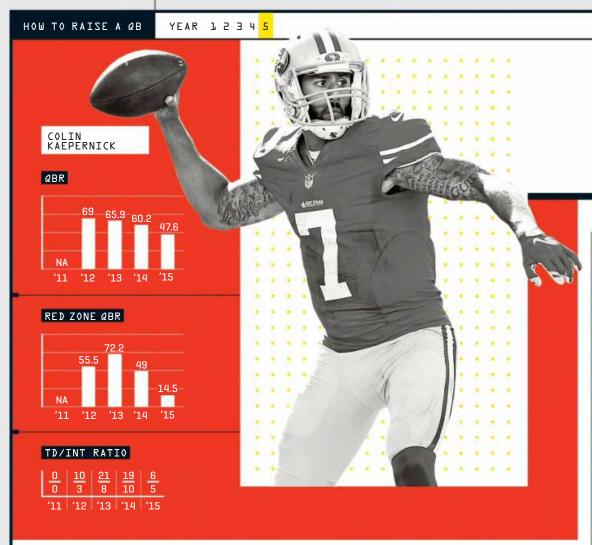


SUGAR BOWL NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA



STREAMING LIVE ON WATCH

**NEW YEAR'S WILL NEVER BE THE SAME** 



Stats through Week 8.

a reset, not a permanent solution.

This past offseason, Kap spent three days a week for six weeks in Phoenix under the tutelage of Warner. Unlike the other quarterback gurus, Warner is one of the few who perfected the craft himself. He possessed the rare mix of quickness, accuracy, heart, brains, work ethic and ruthlessness to become a Hall of Fame-worthy passer. His unlikely story—from stocking shelves in a grocery store to winning a Super Bowl—proved just how undetectable and unpredictable that skill set is. He made for an interesting pair with Kap, whose dazzling running has led to many kissed biceps but also allowed him to avoid learning the position traditionally. Warner's challenge was to teach Kap how he thinks in an incredibly short amount of time, knowing that only a handful of quarterbacks each generation can process the way he did. Says Warner, "I told him, 'The hardest part of this process will be that you don't think

like me, and I've never been able to think like you.' When do I stop being a quarterback and become an athlete? I never had to worry about that."

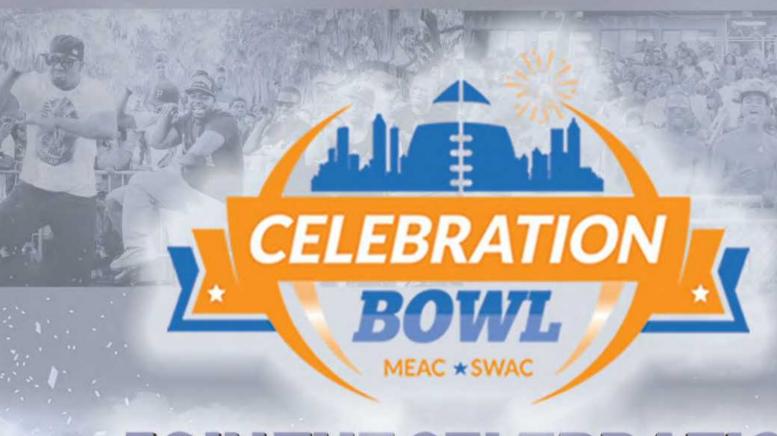
Over a cranberry juice, Warner leans on the table and watches video of a play from Week 4. Fourth quarter, 49ers down 17-3 to Green Bay, trying to rally. On second-and-5 from the Packers' 15-yard line, Kaepernick takes the shotgun snap, sees running back Reggie Bush wide open over the middle for what should be a walk-in touchdown. "A layup," Warner says. Kap fires it in the dirt. Warner rewinds the clip, then freezes the frame as Kap is throwing. "The biggest thing that I see with Kap quite often-and it's frustrating-are his feet." As Kap releases the ball, his feet are parallel to the line of scrimmage, rather than perpendicular. He's throwing with all arm, rather than with his body. The result is a pass both late— Bush was open by three steps before Kap even noticed—and inaccurate.

"Normally good quarterbacks don't throw like that," Warner says.

Warner leans back, disheartened. They had focused on footwork in the offseason. He was even more disheartened when Kap told reporters that he was "not huge" on mechanics. "That tells a big story right there," Warner says. He isn't faulting Kap's work ethic. "He worked his butt off" in their time together, Warner says. He is saying that Kap isn't really a fifth-year quarterback. He's a fifth-year player, 28 years old, but developmentally behind the curve. Warner faults the way football is trending, with youth and college coaches putting their best athletes at quarterback and deploying them in the spread, exactly what happened to Kap at the University of Nevada. "So now," Warner says, "we're saying—at the highest level, against the best talent-you have to learn how to play quarterback. To me, it sounds impossible."

As he has struggled, Kap has become a divisive force in the Bay Area. By all accounts, he's a good, funny dude, but he can be edgy and distrusting. The unyielding self-belief and loner tendencies-eyes down, ears always enclosed by headphones—that fueled his success and drove the 49ers to within 5 yards of a sixth Super Bowl now seem to rub people in the building the wrong way. His receivers have been visibly angry with him this season, throwing up their arms when he misfires or fails to see them open. The 49ers have tried short, quick throws to restore his confidence, but coaches can mask deficiencies for only so long. Kap is in a cruel morass, as much psychological as physiological, trying to solve problems as elementary as footwork against defenses that require a master's degree to decipher. "How long does it take to get there? Can he get there?"

78 ESPN 11.23.2015 Jeff haynes/ap images



## **JOINTHE CELEBRATION**

HERITAGE · LEGACY · PAGEANTRY · TRADITION



GEORGIA DOME ATLANTA, GEORGIA





\*SWAC

MEAC CHAMPION

The Celebration Bowl.com









Warner says. "That's the crapshoot."

Warner moves on to another play, one that, on its surface, shows Kap summoning his old magic. It's against the Ravens, two weeks after the Packers game. He takes the shotgun snap and looks right, darts left as if to run, spins back right, resets and fires a 21-yard touchdown to receiver Quinton Patton, a combination of arm strength and elusiveness that only a few quarterbacks can match.

But no. Warner rewinds to the beginning. Kap sees that his first read is covered. Warner points out that his second read, Anquan Boldin, is wide open on a slant. But Kap doesn't even look his way. Instead, he panics, in a clean pocket. "His feet go haywire," Warner says. "There was no pressure." And when Kap throws, his feet are in the same position as they were on the misfire to Bush. It raises more questions than it answers. Can you live with the pass in the dirt knowing that the same mechanics will produce spectacular plays? Can he still be the 49ers' franchise quarterback—or will it happen elsewhere, with a fresh start, if it happens at all? Like the 49ers, Warner seems resigned. He stares at Kap's feet, parallel to the line of scrimmage, play after play, and imagines trying to beat NFL defenses from a position of weakness.

"It's hard to live in that world," he says.

 ${\bf CAM}\,{\bf NEWTON}\,{\bf KNOWS}\,{\bf his}\,{\bf hands}\,{\bf are}$ weapons. He can dribble a football behind his back and between his legs, and he thinks he should be on the Panthers' hands team. In the game against the Eagles, on one play Newton is bouncing in the pocket when a rusher comes flying at him and knocks the ball out of his right hand. But in a split second, almost too fast to believe, Newton catches

the ball with his left, transfers it back to his right and fires a strike downfield. It's the type of play only he can make.

The thing is, the most important thing Newton does with his right hand is write in his notebooks. He updates them meticulously, head down in meetings, scribbling each day, his notes ranging from keys to the defense to reminders to be patient and take what the coverage gives him. These notes don't just reveal why he has been so successful. They could be the key to answering a long-running question: When will a true dual-threat quarterback dominate the league?

Almost every year since Michael Vick was drafted, a different quarterback has been expected to revolutionize football. Turns out, none of them has. Turns out, pocket passers still own the league, which explains why the best quarterbacks are the most seasoned ones, able to read defenses quickly because they've seen them all. Young, for one, has wondered when the first true triple threat—a quarterback who can run, throw and process from the pocket, and all at a Hall of Fame level—will arrive. He has challenged young quarterbacks to put in the classroom work, to embrace the mundane process of turning chalkboard theories into "reflexive recall." It's the boring side of greatness, three or four years of studying in pursuit of an advanced degree. But as Young often laments, it's hard to persuade guys to do it after they've achieved rapid success. The will to be truly great is more elusive than the skill set.

Newton, with his athleticism and smarts, isn't a true triple threat—yet. The phrase that teammates use most often to describe Newton is "in command." Most of his runs—he averages 5.4 yards a rush and has scored 37 touchdowns in his careerare designed. When he throws, he usually does so from the pocket, negating the narrative of a running quarterback. Many of his best plays from this season have come when he hangs in the pocket and squeezes the ball into the arms of one of his receivers, who are among the worst in the league. Against the Seahawks in October, Newton dropped back and looked left. His first three options were covered. He turned back right, held his feet as the rush closed in and laced a ball between two defenders to tight end Greg Olsen for 32 yards. "It was a full-field read," says Dorsey, the Panthers quarterback coach. "He's really good at making smart, but not conservative, decisions."

Unlike Dalton and Kap this past offseason, Newton didn't work with a quarterback guru. Instead, he played Knockerball, a game in which two people encased in huge plastic balls run into each other; practiced with an Australian Rules football team; made a cameo appearance in a flag football game in Atlanta; and finished his sociology degree at Auburn. But make no mistake: Newton grinds. Ask Dorsey for a play that Newton has made this year that he wouldn't have made last year and he instead describes an entire process, forged over years, the results of which are just now arriving. "He's underappreciated for the preparation he puts in," Dorsey says. On top of the notebooks, Newton polishes his already strong mechanics by focusing on a new point of emphasis each day in practice with Dorsey. Twice this year in the red zone, he has audibled out of bad plays and into touchdowns: Against the Saints he ran for the score, and against the Bucs he threw it—the definition of a triple threat. Newton has become expert at combining "God-given ability," as Olsen says, with "taking what the defense gives him without losing his aggressive mindset," as Dorsey says.

Of course, none of these evolutions alone will change football. But if there's one lesson from Dalton, Kaepernick and Newton, it's that being a great quarterback is about committing yourself to the tedious with the hope that there will be something beautiful on the other end. A hope that nights like Newton has against the Eagles will become routine. As usual, Newton is the best player on the field. After the game, he exits the stadium in slacks, a vest, a jacket and tie and with headphones on his ears. A small circle of people sheepishly stare at him. "How y'all doing?" he says and poses for a few pictures. Just then, a golf cart comes screaming in reverse from 50 yards away and stops at Newton's feet, a perk of superstardom. He hops on to drive off to his car while the lingering fans begin to chant "Cam! Cam!" Newton waves to the crowd, and just as he does, fireworks go off in the background. It seems impossibly glamorous—the opposite of everything that has led him there.

# Our Bowls Runneth Over



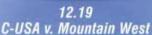








MEAC v. SWAC



12.19 MAC v. Sun Belt 12.19 Mountain West (or BYU) v. PAC-12



12.22 MAC v. Mountain West



12.22 American v. MAC



12.24 American v. Mountain West (or BYU)



12.24 C-USA v. MAC



12.26 Big 12 v. C-USA



12.26 American v. C-USA



12.29

ADVOCARE TEXAS B O W 1

> 12.29 Big 12 v. SEC



12.30 American v. SEC

www.espnevents.com





HOW TO RAISE A

QB

Some NFL QBs have career breakthroughs

early<sub>1</sub> others much later. And some, never at all.

Every young QB is looking for his ta-da season, when the game starts to click. But as Carson Palmer's 2015 shows, sometimes that season comes out of nowhere. We charted, at right, the career performance of every Week 7 starting QB by expected points added per play (EPA/P). Developed by ESPN's Brian Burke, the stat reflects how much any offensive player impacts his team's scoring potential on any one down. The higher the EPA/P, the better the QB. (For a fuller definition, see next page.) What it shows is that the NFL is hard to master, and even some of the greats travel a rough road to Canton. What it also shows: Andy Dalton's Year 5 is shaping up to be the best fifth season of any active QB. So now you know why the redheaded one is gracing our cover. —LUKE KNOX AND PAUL KIX

#### **EXPECTED POINTS ADDED PER PLAY**

POOR Less than 0

AVERAGE 0-0.14

GOOD

EXCELLENT 0.15-0.29 0.3 and higher

Bold box indicates highest EPA/P total among current starters for each year. Or, put another way: which current starter had the best Year 1, Year 2, etc.

	YEAR 1	2	3	4	5	6
Peyton Manning	*	0.18	0.20	0.05	0.13	0.19
Tom Brady		0.05	0.02	0.05	0.18	0.22
Drew Brees		0.02	-0.09	0.28	0.12	0.23
Josh McCown			-0.02			
Carson Palmer		-0.02	0.18	0.12	0.09	
Tony Romo				0.19	0.23	0.07
Ben Roethlisberger	0.21	0.24	0.04	0.20	0.03	0.17
Eli Manning		0.07	0.02	-0.05	0.11	0.18
Philip Rivers			0.16	0.06	0.22	0.33
Alex Smith		-0.05			-0.01	0.00
Aaron Rodgers				0.13	0.23	0.22
Ryan Fitzpatrick				-0.08	-0.09	0.01
Jay Cutler		0.09	0.15	0.03	0.04	0.07
Matt Ryan	0.18	0.13	0.17	0.17	0.24	0.11
Joe Flacco	0.01	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.09	0.03
Matthew Stafford	-0.11		0.15	0.09	0.10	0.10
Brian Hoyer						<b>0</b> .06
Sam Bradford	-0.02	-0.16	0.03			0.01
Cam Newton	0.15	0.18	0.13	0.10	0.13	
Andy Dalton	0.05	0.01	0.11	0.07	0.27	
Colin Kaepernick		0.16	0.15	0.08	0.03	
Tyrod Taylor					0.14	
Russell Wilson	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.06		
Andrew Luck	0.14	0.13	0.15	0.00		
Ryan Tannehill	0.01	0.03	0.10	0.04		
Nick Foles		0.30		0.12		
Kirk Cousins				0.08		
Teddy Bridgewater	0.08	0.08				
Derek Carr	-0.03	0.14				
Blake Bortles	-0.06	0.08				
Marcus Mariota	0.03					
Jameis Winston	0.02					

AVERAGE OF ALL STARTERS, YEARS 1-5 0.09

Totals shown for a minimum of 10 games played in a season. \*The EPA metric was not recorded during Peyton Manning's rookie season of 1998.



2015 stats through Week 7 and courtesy ESPN Stats & Information.

WHAT IS EPA PER PLAY? It's the average expected points added per play for any down in which an offensive player is involved, regardless of game score and time remaining.

### THE TRUTH



BY Howard Bryant



# On the Wrong Track Young Ivy Leaguers are taking over MLB's front offices, leaving many ex-players on a path out of the game.

ony Clark recalls shaping his second act as his playing days were ending. Clark broke in with Detroit in 1995, managed by Hall of Famer Sparky Anderson. With the Yankees, he played for another Hall of Famer, Joe Torre, and was a key member of the negotiating team of players during the 2002 labor agreement that avoided a work stoppage.

"I asked an executive who shall remain nameless what it would take for me to begin transitioning into the front office," Clark told me before Game 4 of the World Series. "He told me the first thing I needed was a four-year degree from a reputable university. If you wanted to join the front office, whatever knowledge I had accumulated in this game didn't count, or at least it was secondary to having a four-year degree. That's where we are today."

Clark, who retired in 2009, is now executive director of the MLB Players Association, but that nameless executive's response to him is part of a larger erasing of people of color from the dugout and the front office. Dusty Baker's recent surprise landing in Washington kept baseball from having no African-American managers for the first time since 1987. The front office is equally inaccessible. Latinos comprise more than a third of all players but are such hired help that the league does not employ a professional translator during the World Series, even though the United Nations is just blocks from MLB headquarters.

Commissioner Rob Manfred said at the World Series that baseball is committed to diversity, but a closer look at those who have actually received high-level jobs contradicts his words. Baseball is getting whiter, younger and chummier, and it's the direct result of its approach to leadership hires, which is taking place under the guise of the most fashionable code word in sports: analytics.

In the front office, analytics is code for "Ivy League," a class-based pipeline that erased the 43-year-old Clark as a candidate. The Phillies hired 35-year-old Dartmouth grad Matt Klentak as GM; the Brewers, 30-year-old Harvard grad David Stearns, who came recommended by Manfred; the Red Sox, 39-year-old Princeton grad Mike Hazen. There are no bootstraps here. Theo Epstein was friends at Yale with Teddy Werner, whose dad, Tom, owned the Padres and later the Red Sox. Epstein rode the connection from San Diego to Boston to history. White, Ivy League and under 40 is the golden ticket, and the few exceptions traveled the elite-college pipeline too, most notably Marlins president

Michael Hill, 44, born to an African-American dad and a Cuban mom and Harvard-educated.

In the dugout, analytics is code for "familiarity." Mets bench coach Bob Geren was the best man at Billy Beane's wedding, hired by Beane to manage the A's for four losing seasons in five years (a .470 winning percentage). Geren was hired by the Mets' Sandy Alderson (Dartmouth, Harvard), who had hired Beane in Oakland. In Toronto, John Gibbons was hired in 2004 by J.P. Ricciardi, who was his minor league roommate in 1981. Gibbons, fired in 2008, was at home in San Antonio managing in Double-A, in his words "mowing his lawn and going to the ballpark" when Alex Anthopoulos, Ricciardi's former assistant, offered him the Blue Jays job again in 2013 because he wanted someone with whom he was familiar. The Seattle job went to Scott Servais (no experience, hired by his old Angels boss Jerry Dipoto). Bud Black (.477) was the first choice in Washington, and Andy Green (no experience) got the San Diego job. Meanwhile, Willie Randolph (.544) and Jerry Manuel (.507) reportedly never received calls. Baker (.526) swallowed his pride and called Seattle, Miami, San Diego and Washington.

Baseball has lost 57 percent of its African-American players over the past 35 years without a succeeding generation (Baker is 66, Randolph and Manuel 61). It recruits players from places with small African-American populations (Latin America and college, where black players comprise 3 percent of the talent pool), which is also true of front-office candidates—Columbia and Harvard are the only Ivy League schools with black undergrad enrollment above 10 percent. Manfred and baseball act wounded when accused of racism, but by increasing barriers to access along class lines, the erasing of minorities is the most predictable outcome.

# REAL FLAVIDA



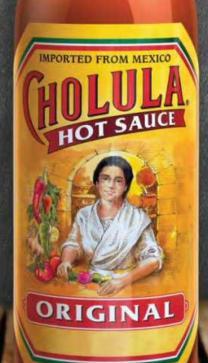


CRAFTED IN MEXICO





UNIQUE



**UNCAP REAL FLAVOR AT** CHOLULA.COM

# THE COMMENT OF A LINE OF THE COMMENT OF THE COMMENT

The bottle that started it all is back. But it won't be around forever. So crack open a Miller Lite Steinie bottle and enjoy a round while it's still around.

**#ITSMILLERTIME** 



GREAT BEER GREAT RESPONSIBILITY.